SPECIAL · COLLECTOR'S · DOUBLE · ISSUE

Entertainment WEEKLY

March 15/22, 2019
#1553/1554

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE
COVER 12 of 16

GAME OVER

78 PAGES

of exclusive **GAME OF THRONES** intel—and a top secret report from the set of the **FINAL EPISODES**

BY JAMES HIBBERD

Conleth Hill as Varys and Iain Glen as Jorah Mormont

A NETFLIX FILM

BEN **AFFLECK** | OSCAR **ISAAC** | CHARLIE **HUNNAM** | GARRETT **HEDLUND** | PEDRO **PASCAL**

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R VIOLENCE AND LANGUAGE THROUGHOUT

PRODUCED BY CHARLES ROVEN, p.g.a. ALEX GARTNER, p.g.a. ANDY HORWITZ, p.g.a. NEAL DODSON, p.g.a. STORY BY MARK BOAL SCREENPLAY BY MARK BOAL AND J.C. CHANDOR DIRECTED BY J.C. CHANDOR

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GREEN LIGHT
LIMITED
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WORTH STOPPING FOR?

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Prototype shown with options. ©2019 Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.

HOW TO COLLECT THEM ALL!

On the Covers

THE NIGHT IS DARK AND FULL OF COVERS

To celebrate the final season of *Game of Thrones*, not only did we put together our biggest single-topic package of all time, we also published a record 16 commemorative covers featuring 22 characters. Why choose a favorite cover when you can collect them all? Go to **backissues.ew.com** to order the set or any individual issue.

ON THE COVERS
The cast of *Game of Thrones* photographed exclusively for EW in June 2018 in Belfast, Northern Ireland

PRODUCTION: SUZANNE REGAN/MINNIE & COAL PRODUCTIONS

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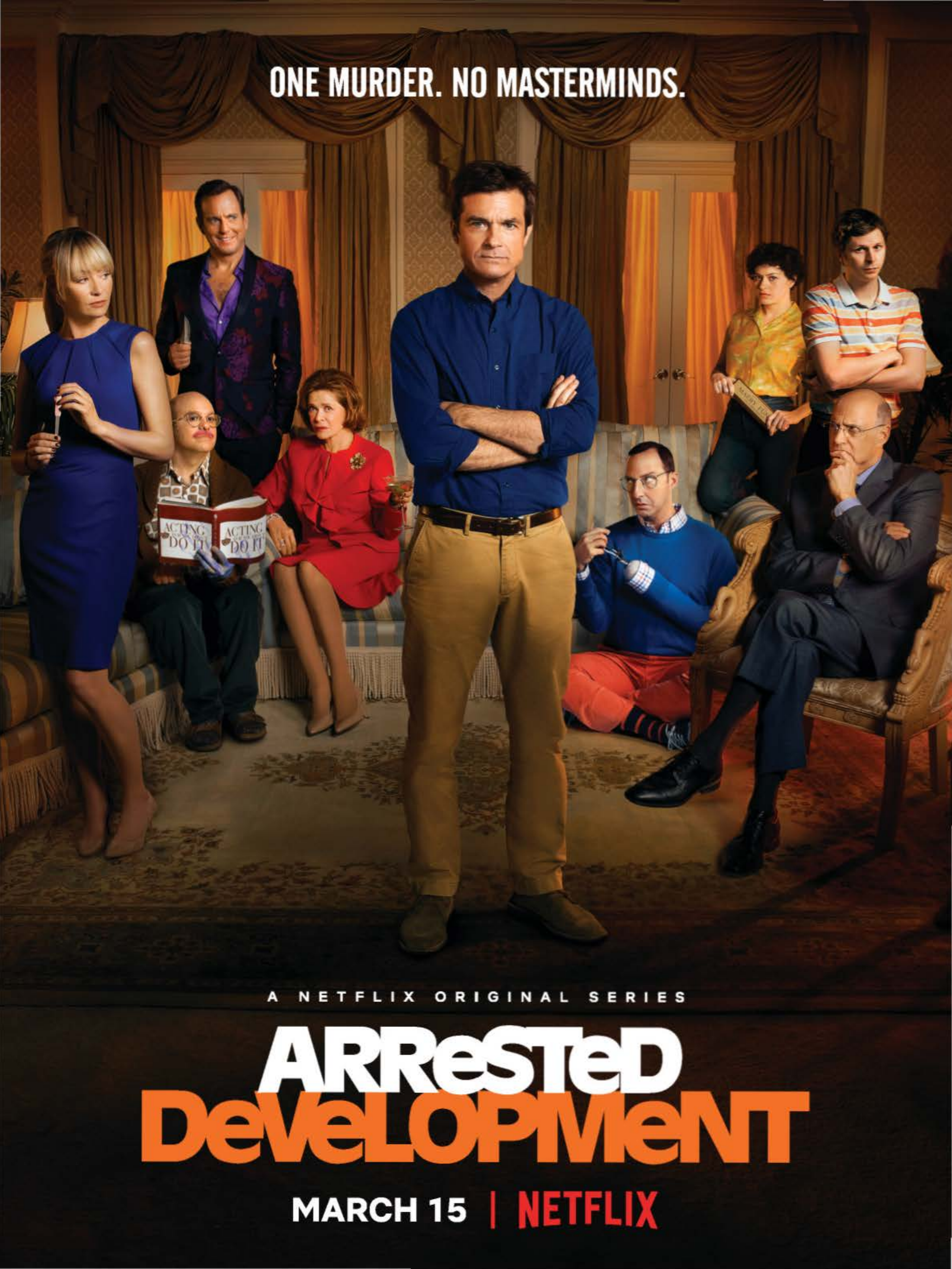
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2019

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Game of Thrones
Check out 78 epic pages of *GoT* intel—including an exclusive journey behind the scenes of the top secret final season.

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The Bullseye

Vladimir Furdik photographed exclusively for EW in June 2018 in Belfast, Northern Ireland

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PHOTOGRAPH BY **MARC HOM**

Communities In Schools

In schools to unlock potential.

At the beginning of his freshman year, Jalen's ambition wavered. He lost sight of his goals and found himself straying from his path. Toriano from Communities In Schools became his trusted guide, working with Jalen to improve his attendance, raise his GPA and set clear goals for the future. Now a senior, Jalen is a first-chair trombone player and drum major in his high school marching band. He's exploring musical scholarship opportunities for college, and he has dreams of becoming a U.S. Marshal. There are millions of at-risk kids like Jalen who need a caring adult to help them stay in school and succeed in life.

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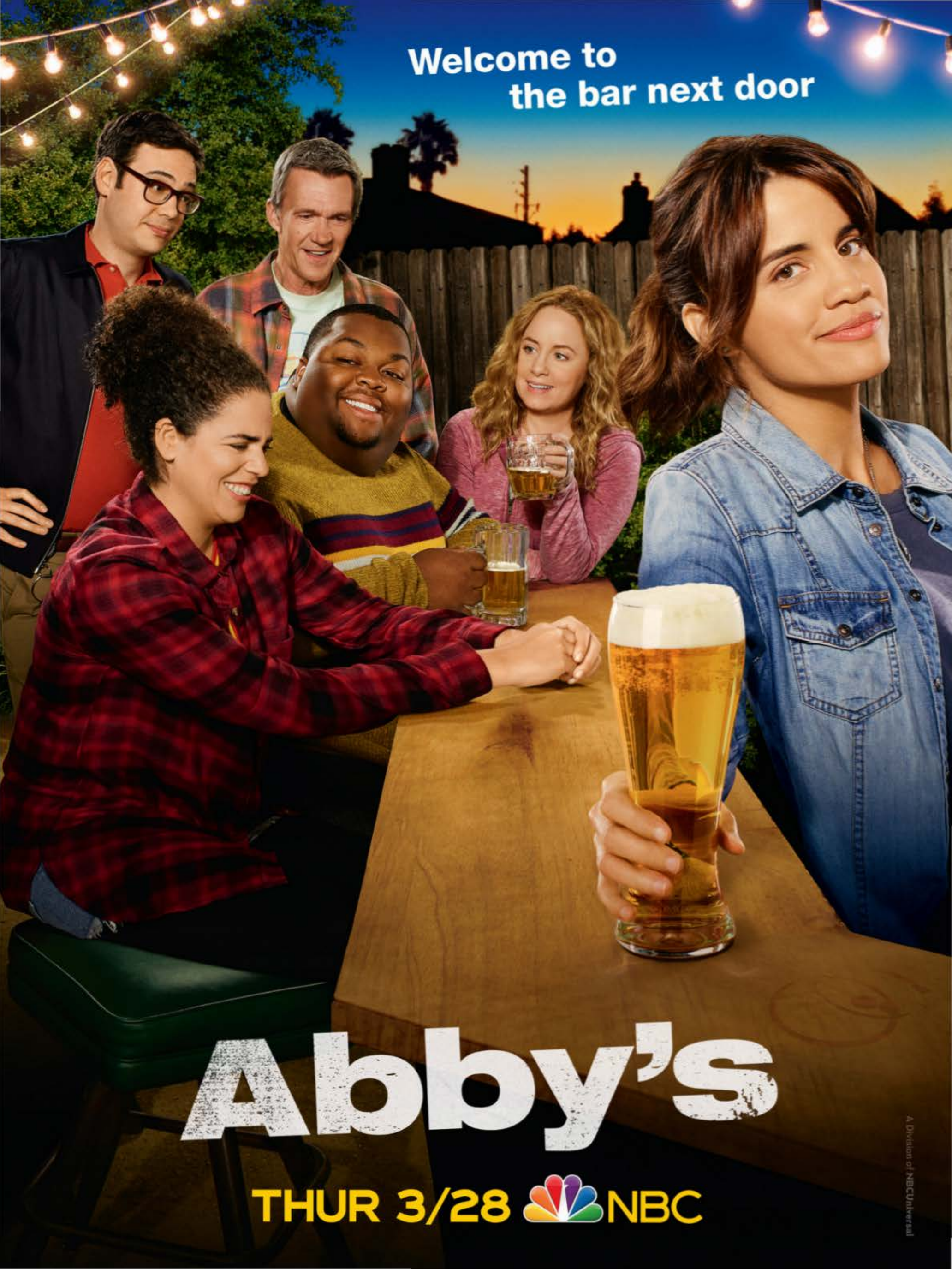
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POP CULTURE'S BEST

Game of Thrones EDITION

Sound Bites

"You are the King Joffrey of pop."

—Jeff Ross, comparing Justin Bieber to the infamous ruler, on *Comedy Central Roast of Justin Bieber*

"Find you a man who talks about you the way Tormund talks about Brienne of Tarth."

—Mindy Kaling, shipping Tormund (Kristofer Hivju) and Brienne (Gwendoline Christie), on Twitter

"It has a lot of nudity... which I fast-forward through to get to the chopped-off heads."

—Dwight (Rainn Wilson), sharing his *Game of Thrones* viewing habits, on *The Office*

"If I wanted to know what happened in Europe a long time ago, I'd watch *Game of Thrones*."

—Troy (Donald Glover), opting for *Game of Thrones* viewing over studying history, on *Community*

"Khaleesi is marrying Jack Sparrow. Oh God, that show has really gone off the rails."

—Leslie (Amy Poehler), revealing a twist in the *Game of Thrones* "series finale" during a flash-forward, on *Parks and Recreation*

"Look, it makes sense if you've read the books."

—Ben (Adam Scott)

"If George R.R. Martin wrote about prisons, I'd be, like, the Hand of the Warden."

—Taystee (Danielle Brooks), wishing she had a better title, on *Orange Is the New Black*

KALING: GETTY IMAGES FOR POPSUGAR PLAY/GROUND; ROSS: ILYA S. SAVENOK/GETTY IMAGES FOR THE SCLERODERMA RESEARCH FOUNDATION; GLOVER: PAUL DRINKWATER/NBC; WILSON: PAUL DRINKWATER/NBC; BROOKS: JOJO WHILDEN/NETFLIX; POEHLER: COLLEEN HAYES/NBC; SCOTT: CHRIS HASTON/NBC

The Village

Love is the thread
that connects us all.

TUES 3/19 NBC

AFTER THIS IS US

The Must List

THE **TOP 10** THINGS WE LOVE THIS WEEK *Edited By* | **MARC SNETIKER @MARCSNETIKER**

DIMITRIOS KAMBOURIS/GETTY IMAGES

1 | TV

BILLIONS

It's more money, more problems for political heavyweight Chuck Rhoades (Paul Giamatti) and billionaire Bobby Axelrod (Damian Lewis) as the fourth season of the addictively rich drama turns the former rivals into allies...for now. *(Showtime)*

Q + A

PAUL GIAMATTI

The actor, 51, talks to EW's Derek Lawrence about flipping the dynamic that Billions *was built on*

Where do we pick up with Chuck? Last we saw, he lost his job and his planned run for office was thwarted.

He's opened a private practice, but that's not satisfying him, so he's looking to build his reputation back up. He's got this alliance with Axelrod that will prove fruitful and helpful, but they're both pretty shifty guys, so one doesn't know how long that will last.

What should we expect from that relationship? I have to imagine there's still plenty of baggage.

There definitely is. There's a certain amount of conceding that they've been staunch rivals and a

ILLUSTRATION BY **RYAN INZANA**

CONTINUED

recognition that they're similar guys, and that's the way in which they connect. Wherever it goes, it's definitely been made more complicated. It's a different sort of rivalry now, if the rivalry does in fact reassert itself.

And where do things stand at home between Chuck and Wendy (Maggie Siff)?

I play a very crazy political card during the middle of the season that's complicated for her. There's a lot of fallout from it. Everyone's always doing something self-subverting on the show. They kind of step on their own d--- all the time.

The show's worlds are split between politics and finance. Do you ever want to hang out on the money side?

No, not so much, because I don't understand what the hell they're talking about half the time. [*Laughs*] I'd get lost in about 30 seconds. I've liked being in the weird political thing that I do. Although I do go over to Axe Capital at some point this season, and may be able to do more next season.

This being your first long-running TV show, how have you kept it fresh for yourself?

I've never done anything for this long. I don't ever get bored because of the stuff I get to do and the language I get to utilize. And the character is very strange, so he can go to some odd places, and he does this season, which has been really fun.

THE STACK! by Tim Stack

BEST POP CULTURE CAPTAINS

1. MARVEL
2. PICARD
3. CRUNCH
4. ...& TENNILLE

Books

OLIVIA NEWTON-JOHN, *DON'T STOP BELIEVIN'*

The award-winning artist explores the highs and lows of her remarkable life in an alternately funny and heartbreaking memoir. Taking readers behind the scenes of her biggest career moments, Newton-John, 70, offers intimate access into her personal life, zeroing in on the experience of surviving three bouts with breast cancer and her dedication to charity and advocacy. The book's message is simple but powerful: Never give up on life.

THREE FACES OF OLIVIA

The actress and singer goes deep into a trio of pivotal periods from her book. BY DAVID CANFIELD

THE ROAD TO *GREASE*

A good chunk of Newton-John's memoir focuses on her humble beginnings; she grinded in the music industry for years before landing the role of Sandy in 1978's *Grease*. "I'm grateful that I was prepared for it, [that] I had many years in the business before that," she tells EW. "I was 29. I started when I was 15. So it was almost 15 years of working before. I was ready—it wasn't a big shock being overwhelmed."

"PHYSICAL" PHENOMENON

"I wasn't sure about it!" Newton-John says of her 1981 album's smash-hit title track. "I recorded it, then I had a panic attack, [thinking] it was too raunchy.... I say in the book: Two of the things I was nervous about turned out to be my biggest successes. One was *Grease*; the other was 'Physical.' Not to say you should always do things you're scared of, but in this [case], both challenged my fears."

A NEW LEASE ON LIFE

"When I first had breast cancer in 1992, I decided to talk about it, and it opened up a new world for me," Newton-John says. She was one of the first entertainers to go public with such a diagnosis. What motivated her to reveal it—and, in turn, become an advocate—is what also prompted her to discuss it in the book. "There's so much nonsense written about my experience. So I just decided to talk about it."

DENISE TRUSCELLO

IF THERE'S ALWAYS A CHANCE OF SHOWERS WHEN YOU'RE AROUND YOU MAY BE MUDDLING THROUGH ALLERGIES

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Music

SOLANGE

WHEN I GET HOME

The multifaceted 32-year-old singer–producer–performance artist returned to her hometown of Houston to record much of this expansive meditation on origin stories, isolation, and black identity. With an intoxicating blend of hip-hop, soul, and jazz—and featuring contributions from Pharrell, The-Dream, and many others—*Home* is the perfect follow-up to Solange's 2016 chart-topping opus, *A Seat at the Table*. Stand-out tracks include "Almeda" and "Dreams."

3

TV

SHRILL

Aidy Bryant steals the show on Hulu's grounded, tenderly funny new half hour, adapted from Lindy West's best-selling book. The *SNL* star plays Annie, a budding journalist juggling a dopey love interest, a mercurial boss, and a flimsy sense of self-worth—and fighting through society's darker corners to find true joy.

HOW TO WRITE AN AIDY-BIOGRAPHY

BY DAVID CANFIELD

Though *Shrill* was developed by some big names—Elizabeth Banks and *SNL* boss Lorne Michaels among them—the series evolved into an expression of Bryant, who co-wrote many of the episodes and got final pass on all scripts. "They really let me take the reins," she says. Working closely with West and showrunner Ali Rushfield, Bryant looked inward to authentically tell Annie's story. "We just wanted to have a fat character with a full, normal life," she says. "There's a lot of stuff [on *Shrill*] that really happened to me or Lindy or someone else in our writers' room." One element that feels especially fresh: the sex scenes, which are realistic, human, and...well, sexy. Bryant felt nervous to film them but knew their value. "This show is about body and self-worth," she explains. "It was important to me to show a fat character with some dignity in that space—in her sexuality. I just had to do it!"

4

BATES MOTEL: JOE LEDERER/A&E; SHRILL: ALLYSON RIGGS/HULU; SOLANGE: TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES

ORIGINAL SERIES
CouchSurfing

DANIEL RADCLIFFE
LOOKS BACK ON HIS MOST MEMORABLE ROLES

STREAMING NOW

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5

Books

THE BIRD KING

by G. Willow Wilson

Having wrapped up her time on the Muslim superhero comic *Ms. Marvel* (not to be confused with *Captain*), Wilson turns to this novel set when the divisions between Islam and "the West" were still taking shape. As Muslim Spain gives way to the Catholic Reconquista, the sultan's concubine escapes with her friend on a quest for a mythical island. "[She] has no interest in being saved," says Wilson. "She's not interested in conforming to anyone's narrative." —*Christian Holub*

6

Movies

CAPTAIN MARVEL

The Marvel Cinematic Universe has a bright new star: Brie Larson, 29, takes flight as Carol Danvers, an Air Force pilot with intergalactic powers, in this hot March release. With the help of a young Nick Fury (Samuel L. Jackson) and an orange cat named Goose, the MCU's first solo female hero is saving the world, one superpowered punch at a time. Thanos better watch his back.

"The beautiful thing about this film: There's a certain level of female sisterhood that I haven't seen in a superhero film before, that we have in abundance. We are really representing ourselves finally, and doing it in such a cohesive way."

—LASHANA LYNCH, WHO PLAYS CAROL'S AIR FORCE BUDDY MARIA RAMBEAU

CAPTAIN MARVEL: CHUCK ZLOTNICK/© MARVEL STUDIOS (2)

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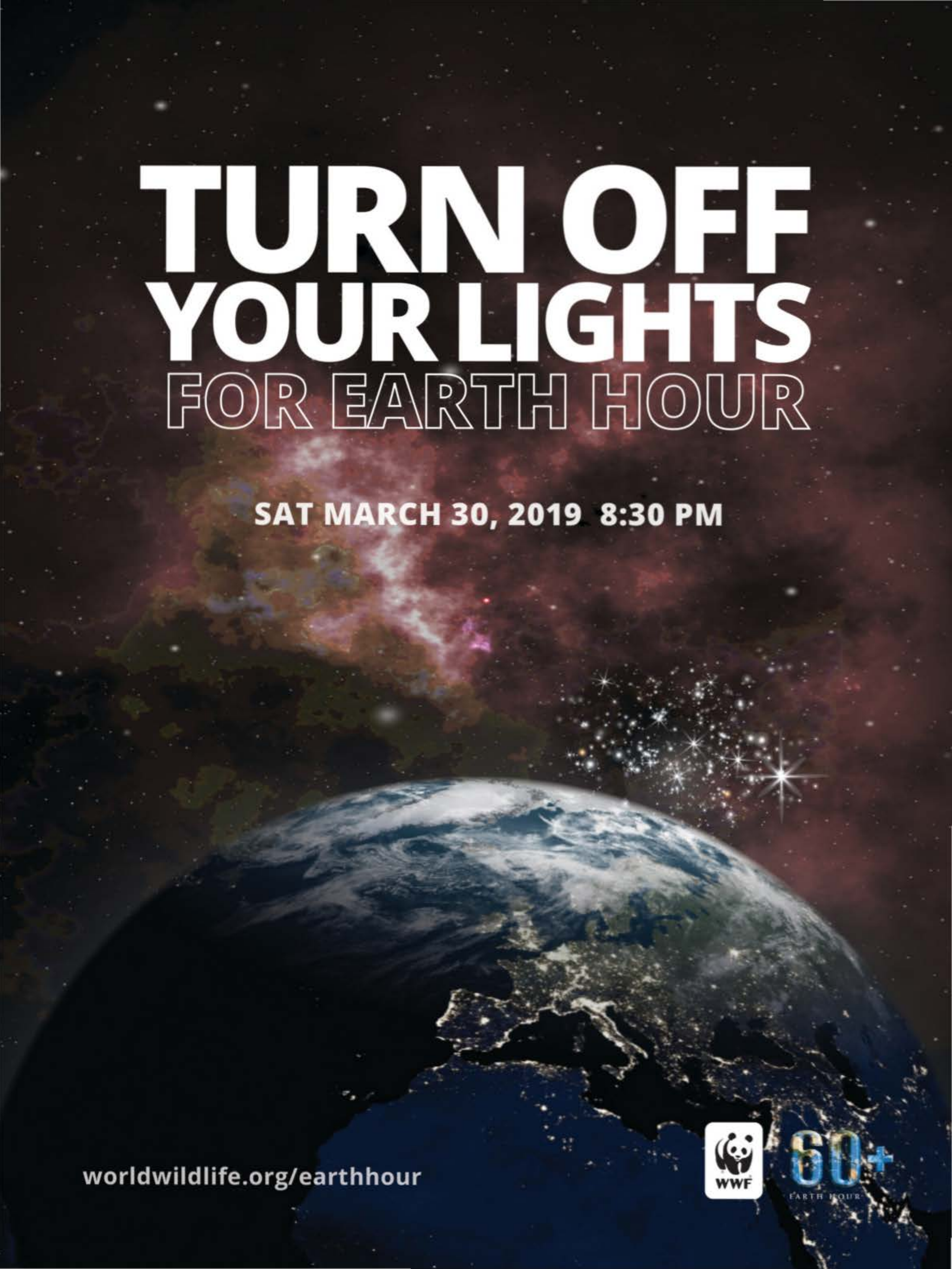

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TV

THE GOOD FIGHT

All rise for season 3 of TV's smartest, weirdest, most topical legal drama (CBS All Access). As Christine Baranski's Diane Lockhart joins the resistance against Trump, she'll have another adversary to contend with: Roland Blum (Michael Sheen), a flamboyant lawyer inspired by infamous McCarthy-era attorney Roy Cohn. Says Baranski of Blum: "He's seductive and bombastic, and Diane will have none of it."

3 QUESTIONS FOR

MICHAEL SHEEN

Sheen, 50, tells EW's Kristen Baldwin about joining the Fight

What did you know about the show beforehand?

I had a few friends who said that it was their favorite show. They were all very switched on politically; they're all funny, smart people as well. I thought, If very smart, funny, politically turned-on women [say] it's their favorite show, then there's got to be something worthwhile about it.

Can you preview Roland's first meeting with Diane?

She comes into her office at night. There's a storm going on outside, and [she] finds this strange man sitting at her desk. She gives nothing away, and he does what he does, which is provoke and test and explore. Some people know, my ex-partner Sarah Silverman made a joke one day about me naming a certain part of my anatomy "The Great Christine Baranski"—which is not true, it was just something that Sarah made up, but it took off. So everyone thought that it would be hilarious to ask Christine about that all the time, poor thing. There's a little cheeky nod to that in the first meeting as well.

Roland has an amazing wardrobe. Did you want to keep any clothes?

I would love to keep them all. I've never had a character who only wears an outfit once and then never again. His clothes are gorgeous and over-the-top, but he himself is like an animal in the forest—he doesn't want anything on his body. There's a moment where Maia [Rose Leslie] comes back to his apartment, and the first thing he does is take his pants off. I love the idea that when he gets home he just walks around naked all the time. He's an animal.

THE GOOD FIGHT: ELIZABETH FISHER/CBS; SHEEN: MIKE MARSLAND/WIREIMAGE

ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY CAST REUNIONS

MY BEST FRIEND'S WEDDING

EXCLUSIVE ORIGINAL EPISODE

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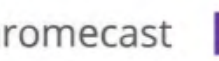

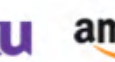

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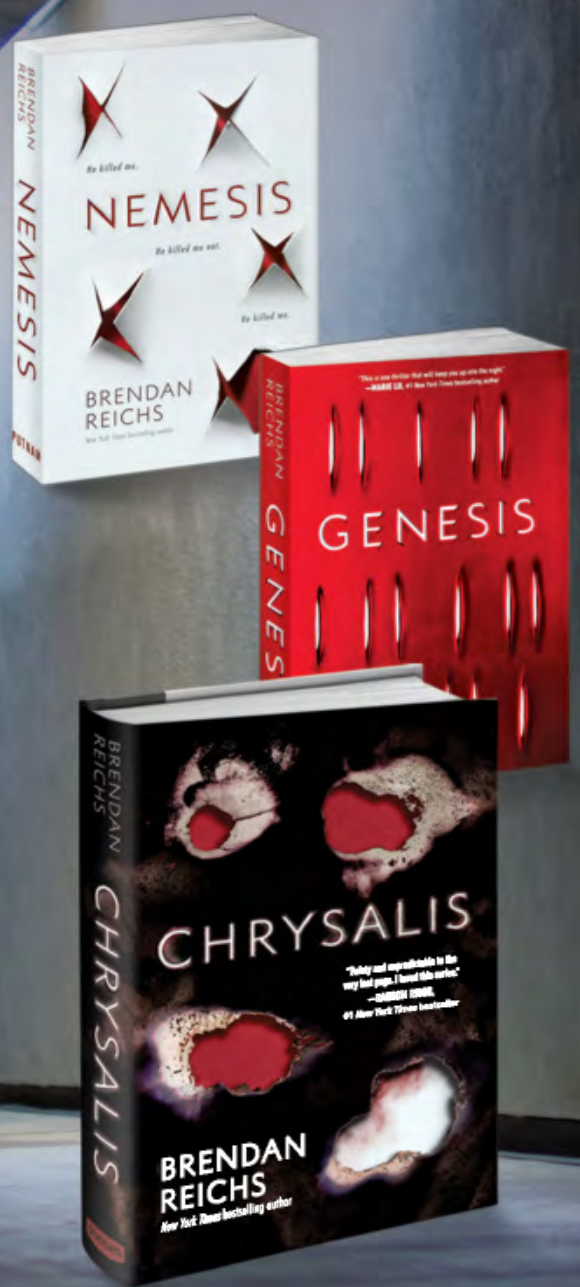
"TWISTY AND UNPREDICTABLE TO THE VERY LAST PAGE."
—RANSOM RIGGS, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*



"ADDICTIVE."
—VICTORIA AVEYARD, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Red Queen*

"SO GOOD IT'S SCARY."
—MARGARET STOHL, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Black Widow: Forever Red*

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BIRTHDAY BUDDIES (MARCH 14) *Albert Einstein* | *Ansel Elgort*

8

THE LATE-NIGHT HOSTS WE NEED RIGHT NOW

TV

DESUS & MERO

After cultivating their brand through Twitter and podcasting, comic duo Desus Nice (Daniel Baker) and the Kid Mero (Joel Martinez) found a fresh TV audience with their self-titled show on Viceland. Some 300 episodes later, they've relocated to Showtime as hosts of the network's first-ever late-night series. But don't worry: The bigger spotlight hasn't changed the Boogie Down Bronx natives, as evidenced by their buzzy premiere episode, in which they spoofed the Oscar-winning *Green Book* ("*Friday* with racism," according to Desus) and interviewed social media's favorite politician, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. These two already have our vote. *(Showtime, Thursdays, 11 p.m.)*

EINSTEIN: BETTMANN ARCHIVE; ELGORT: VALERIE MACON/GETTY IMAGES; *DESUS & MERO*: MICAIAH CARTER/SHOWTIME

9

Music

MAREN MORRIS

GIRL

Seated snugly on the country-pop bench right between Kacey Musgraves and Kelsea Ballerini is Texas native Maren Morris, whose previous hits—including that ubiquitous earworm "The Middle"—are but a warm-up round for her genuinely stunning sophomore album. This'll be a big one for Morris, and you'll be happy to say you caught it early. Girl, it's *that* good.

MAREN MORRIS: JEFF KRAVITZ/ACMA2018/FILMMAGIC

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PARK ROW BOOKS

10

TV

THE ESSENTIAL LUKE PERRY

Riverdale's Luke Perry—who rose to fame on *Beverly Hills, 90210*—died on March 4 at age 52 in Burbank after suffering a massive stroke five days earlier. "He was surrounded by his children Jack and Sophie, fiancée Wendy Madison Bauer, ex-wife Minnie Sharp, mother Ann Bennett, stepfather Steve Bennett, brother Tom Perry, sister Amy Coder, and other close family and friends," his rep said of the actor's passing. "The family appreciates the outpouring of support and prayers that have been extended to Luke from around the world." Here, EW critic Kristen Baldwin adds her appreciation.

EVERETT COLLECTION

LUKE PERRY WAS USED TO REQUESTS LIKE this. The year was 2016, and the actor was making the rounds at San Diego Comic-Con with the cast of his new show, *Riverdale*. After shooting an on-camera interview, Perry was leaving the studio when a woman in her 40s—the prime age bracket for *Beverly Hills, 90210* fandom—approached him with a request for a picture. "Absolutely," he replied. Perry stepped behind his fan and wrapped his arms around her, resting his chin on her shoulder. *Click*. (That fan would be me, if you haven't already guessed.)

It isn't easy being a "former teen heartthrob," but Perry didn't run from his past—he embraced it. From the moment he first cruised into Beverly Hills as bad boy Dylan McKay, Perry epitomized everything we wanted in a 1990s dreamboat: retro-cool pompadour, that sexy rasp, and a tough-guy swagger that belied the soft heart underneath. The character of Dylan was a pastiche—think James Dean, Marlon Brando—but in Perry's hands he was a perfect teen antihero, a Byron-reading loner broody enough to make your parents

(*Clockwise from left*) Luke Perry on *Beverly Hills, 90210*; center, with the *90210* cast; on *Oz*; with KJ Apa on *Riverdale*

nervous but sweet enough to take your virginity. Brandon (Jason Priestley) may have been *90210*'s leading man, but Dylan was its raison d'etre, a dream boyfriend for viewers just starting to explore their own sexuality.

Perry's post-*90210* career was bumpy but always interesting: a televangelist on *Oz*; a cuckolded lottery winner on the NBC drama *Windfall*; a cult leader on *Criminal Minds*. It wasn't until 2017, though, that TV experienced the Perryssance with *Riverdale*. As Archie's morally upstanding dad, Fred Andrews, Perry used everything that had made him so sexy as Dylan—the expressive brows, the husky murmur—and channeled it into creating the platonic ideal of a TV dad.

When news of Perry's stroke first broke, the Twitterverse was flooded with prayers from his fans, many who fell in love with him in the '90s. But there were also countless messages from younger viewers who knew Perry only from *Riverdale*. In the hours after his death, "Luke Perry," "Dylan," and "Fred Andrews" were all trending on Twitter. What a testament to the actor's longevity, and his ageless appeal. Rest in peace, Luke.

HIS STANDOUT ROLES

The actor starred in dozens of projects, but these three TV hits were our favorites

BEVERLY HILLS, 90210

1990–2000

Fox's soap about two squeaky-clean Minnesota teens who move to California was initially—dare we say it?—a little boring. That is, until Perry's Dylan McKay swept a moody young woman named Brenda Walsh (Shannen Doherty) off her feet. Perry, who honed his sexy smolder on the daytime drama *Another World*, gave *90210*'s resident bad boy a safe-for-prime-time sex appeal and a relatable, angsty loneliness. We couldn't even be mad at Dylan when he betrayed Brenda by dating her best friend, Kelly (Jennie Garth). Perry played every beat of Dylan's story—from the sublime (that series-finale kiss with Kelly!) to the ridiculous (those past lives, oy!)—with heart, and we were the ones who fell in love. ***—KB***

OZ

2001–2002

Refusing to be imprisoned by his heartthrob status, Perry imprisoned himself. In his first significant role after *90210*, he joined HBO's hardcore penitentiary drama, appearing in 10 episodes as assured evangelist Jeremiah Cloutier, serving hard time for embezzling money from his church. While preaching salvation and nonviolence, Reverend Cloutier bravely and brazenly wandered into potent prison politics and pissed off the wrong inmates. He was sealed behind a kitchen wall and left to die, only to be rescued by an explosion that left him horrifically burned; he then materialized as a vision to an inmate, only to wind up entombed again behind a different wall. Perry's time in Oswald State Correctional Facility proved both haunting and a leap of faith. ***—Dan Snierson***

RIVERDALE

2017–2019

It was a fitting evolution: former teen idol Perry playing Fred Andrews, father to one of America's most iconic high school characters, Archie Andrews (KJ Apa). But Perry's work on The CW's noir drama was more than just stunt casting. The actor grounded the wild series with a gentle weariness and gave the relationship between Archie and Fred a genuine warmth and sweetness. (Archie surprising Fred with an old jalopy in season 2 was a tear-jerker.) *Riverdale*—which shut down production in the wake of Perry's death and has yet to reveal how it will handle his absence from the show—might be full of masked killers and greedy mobsters, but the resilience and goodness of the Andrews men always burned bright and was embodied in Perry's performance. ***—Tim Stack***

RIVERDALE: THE CW; *OZ*: HBO

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"DRACARYS."

Illustration by **JUSTIN METZ** *and* **WORACHOT RUENGSRI**

Game of Thrones

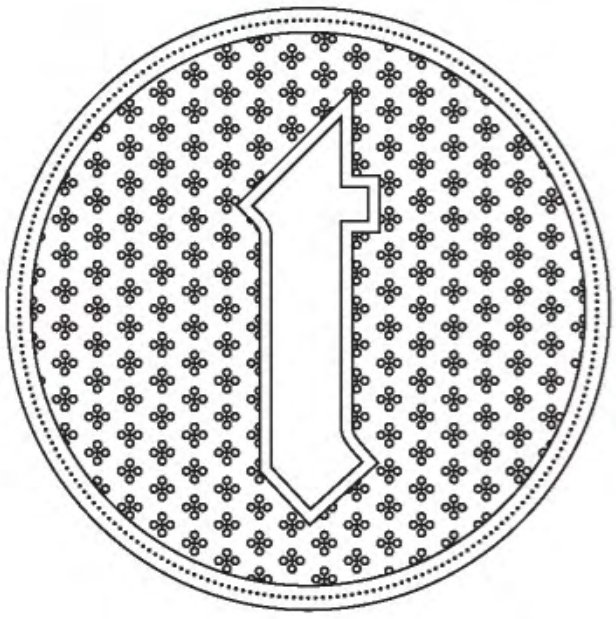
Final Fantasy

An exclusive journey behind the scenes of the top secret final season—and the brutal staging of the most epic battle of all time.

By **JAMES HIBBERD** @JamesHibberd

Photographs by **MARC HOM** @marchomstudio

The cast of *Game of Thrones* photographed exclusively for EW in June 2018 in Belfast, Northern Ireland



The great battle is over. ◆ The snowy ground is streaked with blood. ◆ Beloved heroes lie dead outside the castle gates. ◆ Winterfell is quiet. ◆ And then... ◆ A sudden roar from above. A gust of wind. A blur of low-flying movement. ◆ A dragon? ◆ No. ◆ An *ice* dragon? ◆ Worse. ◆ "F---ing spoiler helicopter just flew right over the set!" says an alarmed crew member.

This could be a disaster. It's April 2018 on the set of the final season of *Game of Thrones* in Northern Ireland. The helicopter seemingly came out of nowhere and flew directly over a ridiculously sensitive scene. The production is supposed to have government-protected airspace—no planes, no drones, and sure as the seven hells no mystery choppers buzzing Winterfell. If paparazzi armed with cameras were on board, their photos would cause an explosion in the entertainment universe. Did anybody get its tail number?

1

PRODUCTION: SUZANNE REGAN/MINNIE & COAL PRODUCTIONS

HONOR ROLES

1 • Sansa Stark

The Lady of Winterfell is preparing the North for war—and hosting the dragon queen and her armies. "Sansa is very much enjoying becoming a leader in her own right," says Sophie Turner. "And this year there are certain challenges by people who threaten that."

2 • Arya Stark

Arya has made up with Sansa, and the sisters are now a united front at Winterfell. But there's still at least one name left to cross off her list. "There's this split with Arya between trying to be who she wants to be—getting back to that naivete and innocence with her family—and her unfinished business," says Maisie Williams.

The production calls the Civil Aviation Authority to track down the pilot's identity while showrunners David Benioff and Dan Weiss are informed of the potential breach. As usual, they are calm. You cannot command a set as sprawling and intense as *Game of Thrones*' and lose your cool every time there might be a catastrophe, or you'd never stop hyperventilating.

"There's always a crisis, there's always an imminent disaster," Benioff says. "You never quite know where it's coming from, but over time you get a sense of where the real catastrophes are and which ones are probably going to be okay."

After a tense hour, the news comes down: It was a police helicopter. So *GoT*'s secrets remain safe for now. All the while, the production never stopped moving. The show must go on, after all, and the HBO drama's final season is the biggest show on the planet, spending 10 months filming just six episodes for its climactic season 8. Expectations are incredibly high.

"The fans will not be let down," says director David Nutter. "There are a lot of firsts in these episodes. There's the funniest sequence I've ever shot on this show, the most emotional and compelling scene I've ever shot, and there's one scene where there's so many [major characters] together, it feels like you're watching a superhero movie."

Nutter tackled three episodes in the final season, including a calm-before-the-storm entry that might surprise viewers with its play-like intimacy. The showrunners also directed one episode: the mysterious series finale. (More on that in a bit.)

But it's the season's most ambitious entry—we can't tell you where it falls in the season, but it was arguably the most difficult-to-produce episode in television history—that's expected to be particularly staggering.

The episode chronicles the great battle of Winterfell, pitting an uneasy collection of allies against the Night King and his

army—a face-off teased from the series' very first scene. It's one of two in the final season directed by Miguel Sapochnik, who previously tackled "Hardhome" and the Emmy-winning "Battle of the Bastards." Here fan favorites like Jon Snow (Kit Harington), Daenerys Targaryen (Emilia Clarke), Tyrion Lannister (Peter Dinklage), Arya Stark (Maisie Williams), Sansa Stark (Sophie Turner), and Brienne of Tarth (Gwendoline Christie) are fighting for their lives, impossibly outnumbered against a supernatural enemy.

The episode is expected to be the longest consecutive battle sequence ever committed to film and brings the largest number of major *GoT* characters together since the show's debut episode in 2011 ("You can't have this many actors on set, there are too many egos!" jokes Harington).

"This final face-off between the Army of the Dead and the army of the living is completely unprecedented and relentless and a mixture of genres even within the battle," says coexecutive producer Bryan Cogman. "There are sequences built within sequences built within sequences. David and Dan [wrote] an amazing puzzle, and Miguel came in and took it apart and put it together again. It's been exhausting, but I think it will blow everybody away."

"Exhausting" is quite the understatement. The episode required 11 weeks of grueling night shoots. Imagine up to 750 people working all night long for nearly three months in the middle of open rural countryside: The temperatures are freezing, in the low 30s; they're laboring in icy rain and piercing wind, thick, ankle-deep mud; there's reeking horse manure and choking smoke. The stars of *Game of Thrones* require some coaxing to get candid about their experience because nobody wants to sound like they're whinging (as the Hound would say). But if you spend even a brief time on set, you realize that staging the battle was unprecedentedly brutal.

> ***There are moments you're just broken as a human and just want to cry."***
> **—MAISIE WILLIAMS**

For Williams, the episode marks Arya's first *Game of Thrones* battle, an irony that isn't lost on her. "I skip the battle every year, which is bizarre since Arya's the one who's been training the most," she says. "This is my first taste of it. And I've been thrown in at the deep end."

A full year before filming began, Sapochnik phoned Williams to warn her. "Start training now," he said, "because this is going to be really hard."

"And I said, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah,'" Williams recalls between takes, looking ultra-grimy with dirt and mock blood on her face (as do all the actors). "But nothing can prepare you for how physically draining it is. It's night after night, and again and again, and it just doesn't stop. You can't get sick, and you have to look out for yourself because there's so much to do that nobody else can do.... There are moments you're just broken as a human and just want to cry."

Williams' feelings are backed up by seasoned action veterans on the show, such as Iain Glen, who plays Ser Jorah Mormont. "It was the most unpleasant experience I've had on *Thrones*," Glen says. "A real test, really miserable. You get to sleep at seven in the morning and when you wake in the midday you're still so spent you can't really do anything, and then you're back. You have no life outside it. You have an absolute f---ed bunch of actors. But without getting too Method about it, on screen it bleeds through to the reality of the *Thrones* world."

Concurs the Hound actor Rory McCann: "Everybody prays they never have to do this again."

To get periodic warmth, actors occasionally huddle around a space heater in a tent or duck inside the production's cramped bare-bones trailers. But for the show's crew there is no relief. "I heard the crew was getting 40,000 steps a day on their pedometers," Liam Cunningham (Ser Davos Seaworth) says. "They're the f---ing heroes." Sporadically, one of the crew members is switched to the day shift, during which a different episode is being shot, and you can instantly spot the gaunt, gray-faced battle-episode workers. "It's like seeing Nosferatu coming in," Benioff says.

When preparing for the shoot, Sapochnik tried to find a longer battle sequence in cinema history and couldn't. The closest was the nearly 40-minute Helm's Deep siege in *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, which he studied to determine when the audience would get "battle fatigue" from too much hacking and

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6

3 • Jorah Mormont

Daenerys' longtime adviser has returned. Can he save her from the Army of the Dead? "He'll be tested like never before," says Iain Glen.

4 • Daenerys Targaryen

Dany is bringing her Dothraki and Unsullied armies (and her dragons) to Winterfell to help fight the Night King, while also hoping to claim the Iron Throne. "There's so much she's seen and witnessed and been through and lost and suffered and hurt," says Emilia Clarke. "She's been working for this her entire existence."

5 • Jon Snow

The King in the North found unexpected love in Daenerys' arms, yet he's about to learn that the ambitious dragon queen is his aunt—and that he also has a claim to the Iron Throne. "The end of the world might be coming soon," says Kit Harington. "But at least he's in love with somebody and knows who he is—and then comes a sledgehammer."

6 • Missandei

Dany's loyal right-hand woman has to help her queen navigate the politics of the North while continuing her Grey Worm romance: "He's the thing she wants to live for," says Nathalie Emmanuel. "They've got this lovely bond that is worth fighting for."

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7 • Melisandre

The Red Woman was last bound for Volantis, but told Varys her destiny was to return to Westeros to die. "She's definitely on a mission," says Carice van Houten.

8 • Davos Seaworth

The Onion Knight found a new leader to advise in Jon Snow, who will need his strategic mind for the coming battle. "This is what people have been waiting for," says Liam Cunningham.

9 • Samwell Tarly

Sam has deduced, as has Bran, the secret of Jon Snow's parentage. So how will he break it to him? "Sam is really feeling the responsibility," says John Bradley. "But he knows Jon would rather hear this from Sam than anybody else."

10 • Lord Varys

The Master of Whisperers advises Daenerys in her conquest with astute knowledge of Westerosi history. "He is effective, as always," Conleth Hill says.

11 • Grey Worm

The fearless captain of Daenerys' Unsullied army has a strong motivation to keep their team safe: Missandei. "The chances of anyone surviving are remote, and they're aware of that," says Jacob Anderson.

12 • The Hound

After years of servitude, he has joined Team Dany and "found a bit of peace," says Rory McCann. His murderous sibling—Cersei's guardian, the Mountain—could change that: "There will be a chance of squaring up to his brother and facing those demons."

13 • Bran Stark

The Three-Eyed Raven continues to learn to use his seer powers. "We see a slightly wiser Bran this year who's less like a robot overload," says Isaac Hempstead Wright.

14 • Gilly

Sam's wildling love hopes to protect her child at Winterfell. "One of the things that's so exciting is everyone is so involved," Hannah Murray says.

15 • Euron Greyjoy

Theon's power-hungry uncle was last seen leaving Westeros to hire 20,000 mercenaries to help Cersei betray Daenerys. "He wants to become the king of the Seven Kingdoms," says Pilou Asbæk.

16 • Theon Greyjoy

The cowardly and castrated former Stark ward left Dragonstone to rescue his sister, Yara, from imprisonment in King's Landing. "There are choices to be made and a coming together," says Alfie Allen.

17 • The Mountain

The mute monstrosity crushes Cersei's enemies at the Red Keep.

slashing. "It feels like the only way to really approach it properly is take every sequence and ask yourself: 'Why would I care to keep watching?'" says the British director between takes. "One thing I found is the less action—the less fighting—you can have in a sequence, the better."

Another directorial challenge was figuring out which character to focus on in each scene when so many heroes are involved. "The [*GoT* battles] I've done previously were generally from Jon's perspective," Sapochnik says. "Here I've got 20-some cast members and everyone would like it to be their scene. That's complicated because I find the best battle sequences are when you have a strong point of view. I keep thinking: 'Whose story am I telling right now?'"

Part of Sapochnik's strategy is asking the actors to fill in the blanks of their story line of what happens whenever the camera cuts to somebody else. As John Bradley (Samwell Tarly) explains: "We may not have seen Sam for 10 minutes, but something has happened to Sam in those 10 minutes—you've been fighting, or you've been running, or you've been hiding. How has your story developed? You have to hold in your mind what's happened since we saw you last."

To keep actors focused during the long cold hours, Sapochnik surprises them with questions. "You're in the middle of a battle and Miguel comes up and goes, 'Why are you here?'" McCann says. "Why *am* I here? It gets you thinking. Then he'll go to another actor and go, 'What are you fighting for?'" (One actor snarks back, "My close-up!") As Glen notes: "Everybody is fighting for a personal reason, and Miguel tries to imbue every moment in that."

During a scene that requires a lot of standing still (not during the fighting), one of the show's series-regular actresses abruptly collapses. "Medic on set!" a crew member yells. The showrunners are out of their tent in a flash and run to her. For a few still moments, it feels like the whole cast

and crew are holding their collective breath. Then the news circulates that she's okay, "just fainted." The actress goes home early and is back the next day.

Production wasn't always going to be this tough. The original schedule made capturing the battle more manageable by breaking up filming into very short specific shots that would, on an average night, require a smaller cast and crew. That's the standard Hollywood approach to assembling an action sequence.

"We built this massive new part of Winterfell and originally thought, 'We'll film this part here and this part there,' and basically broke it down into so many pieces it would be shot like a Marvel movie, with never any flow or improvisation," Sapochnik says. "Even on *Star Wars*, they build certain parts of the set and then add huge elements of greenscreen. And that makes sense. There's an efficiency to that. But I turned to the producers and said, 'I don't want to do 11 weeks of night shoots, and no one else does. But if we don't, we're going to lose what makes *Game of Thrones* cool, and that is that it feels real.'"

The producers agreed. "When you have rapid cutting [in an action scene], you can tell it was all assembled in post-production," Benioff says. "That's not the show's style, and it's not Miguel's style." So they approved a schedule that became infamously known among the team as "The Long Night."

Amid the exhaustion, every detail still counts. During one scene, Bradley's Sam wields a sword at undead wight attackers played by stuntmen (the script whimsically says of the wights: "They're zombies but not zombies, we have our own thing").

> ***"A good story isn't a good story if you have a bad ending. Of course we worry."***
> **—DAVID BENIOFF**

When I note to Cogman that Sam looks like a badass, the producer turns to others: "You hear what he just said? *That's* the problem. Sam isn't supposed to look like a badass."

Bradley quickly adjusts his performance. The next take he looks more confused, awkward, and startled by each new attack. It clicks. Suddenly you're not seeing badass Bradley, but Samwell Tarly.

"When doing these huge fight sequences, you get carried away sometimes," Bradley says. "You want to make yourself look as good as possible. Miguel said to me, 'I know that you want to show you're quite good at this. But remember your character. Sam's not that good at this. You have to play him because that's what's going to be truthful. So stop being so good!'"

The battle scenes shot inside the studio during the day are tough as well. The production's cavernous Paint Hall hangar is kept full of smoke created by a machine that heats up paraffin and fish oil. Soon the cast and crew find themselves coughing up fishy candle wax. Protective paper masks multiply in popularity, and one crew member has an asthma attack and is taken to the hospital.

During some rare downtime in the dim, smoky hangar, two seated figures are enjoying a moment of respite with some tea.

"We're no longer the little kids of *Game of Thrones*," Turner reflects.

"Thank God," Williams replies.

"You know the *Titanic* was built here," Turner says. "All that child labor went into it, and the child labor continues here today."

"Except they had it worse—they weren't brought tea," Williams says.

Sapochnik suddenly appears and halts their banter: "Do you know what you're doing next?"

"We think so," Williams says.

"Have you seen your scene?" he asks, referring to a "pre-viz" animation he mocked up of the battle episode.

"Yes," Turner replies. "Can we see the whole episode?"

"No."

"Rumor has it it's 90 minutes long," she prods.

Sapochnik just smiles and darts to his next task. He's directing three different units shooting three different scenes all at the same time, which is, frankly, nuts. "If Miguel lives through this it will be the hardest thing he's ever done," executive producer Bernadette Caulfield says. "The hardest thing all of us have ever done."

Spoiler: The cast and crew lived. And all our favorite characters? Well, their fates remain to be seen. Crew members don triumphant "We Survived the Long Night" jackets.

Yet there's another episode in the final season where fan

18 • Tyrion Lannister

Tyrion is advising Daenerys and believes in her mission to make Westeros a better place, yet his support could be tested if she moves to overthrow his sister, Cersei. "He's trying to figure out who he really is in this storm of negotiations," says Peter Dinklage.

19 • Jaime Lannister

At the end of season 7, Jaime defied his sister, Cersei, to fulfill his promise to help fight the Army of the Dead. "It's easy to misinterpret that as 'He's choosing to leave her,'" says Nikolaj Coster-Waldau. "But I think it's more that he's choosing to do what he believes is right."

20 • Cersei Lannister

The queen, who discovered she was pregnant at the end of last season, schemes in King's Landing to break her promise to Daenerys, while finding herself indebted to the loathsome pirate Euron Greyjoy. "As usual with Cersei, she's trapped in a web of her own making," says Lena Headey.

21 • Brienne

Brienne returns to Sansa's side at Winterfell to join the fight against the White Walkers. "This is the season where Brienne's gender is really no longer an issue," says Gwendoline Christie. "She's treated as an equal by all."

Game, Set, Watch

The final season is under lock and key before its April 14 premiere, but EW has an exclusive first look at three scenes. From top: Daenerys (Emilia Clarke) leads her army to Winterfell; Brienne (Gwendoline Christie) and Ser Davos (Liam Cunningham) bundle up for winter; and Cersei (Lena Headey) is well guarded at the Red Keep.

expectations are running even higher: the show's extremely top secret final episode, directed by Benioff and Weiss.

For the finale, secrecy was ratcheted up to another level. Only crew members wearing a special "Episode 6" badge were allowed on set during filming, and some scenes were shot on a closed set.

"When something has been sitting with you for so long, you have such a specific sense of the way each moment should play and feel," Weiss explains of the pair's decision to helm the episode. "Not just in terms of 'this shot or that shot,' though sometimes it's that as well. So it's not really fair to ask somebody else to get that right. We'd be lurking over their shoulder every take, driving them crazy, making it hard for them to do their job. If we're going to drive anybody crazy, it might as well be ourselves."

And what will the *Game of Thrones* ending feel like? The show's cast has teased a wide and conflicting spectrum of reactions in media interviews. You know this is a story that subverts conventional fantasy storytelling. And you might also know Benioff and Weiss have long said they ignore what fans say they think they want in their story.

Still, make no mistake...

"We want people to love it," Weiss says. "It matters a *lot* to us. We've spent 11 years doing this. We also know, no matter what we do, even if it's the optimal version, that a certain number of people will hate the best of all possible versions. There is no version where everybody says, 'I have to admit, I agree with every other person on the planet that this is the perfect way to do this'—that's an impossible reality that doesn't exist. I'm hoping for the *Breaking Bad* [finale] argument where it's like, 'Is that an A or an A+?'"

Adds Benioff: "From the beginning we've talked about how the show would end. A good story isn't a good story if you have a bad ending. Of course we worry."

The finale will air on May 19. Tens of millions of fans around the world will tune in to see which characters perish, which survive (if any), and who sits on the Iron Throne (if anyone). And then we'll enter a post–*Game of Thrones* world, with all our watches having ended.

Benioff is pretty blunt about his finale viewing plans. "I plan to be very drunk," he says, "and very far from the internet." ◆

HELEN SLOAN/HBO (3)

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YOUR Watch BEGINS

A complete viewer's guide to all 67 episodes

SEASON 1

E.1 / **WINTER IS COMING**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Tim Van Patten* **PLOT** After the death of his right-hand man, King Robert Baratheon travels north to Winterfell to ask his old friend Lord Eddard "Ned" Stark to assume the role. The queen, Cersei; her twin brother, Jaime Lannister; and their brother Tyrion Lannister arrive with the king. The two families intermingle to devastating result: Bran (the second youngest of the Stark children) interrupts Jaime and Cersei having incestuous sex, so Jaime pushes him from a tower window to silence him. Across the Narrow Sea in Pentos, exiled prince Viserys Targaryen forces his sister, Daenerys, to wed Khal Drogo, the leader of a Dothraki tribe, in exchange for an army so he can return to Westeros and reclaim his father's Iron Throne. **INTRODUCES** Everyone, plus White Walkers (the undead entities that live Beyond the Wall), the Starks' pet direwolves, their ward Theon Greyjoy, and the treacherous prince Joffrey. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Dany receives three petrified dragon eggs as a wedding gift. **A–**

E.2 / **THE KINGSROAD**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Tim Van Patten* **PLOT** Ned and his two daughters, Arya and Sansa, leave Winterfell for the capital. En route south, Joffrey orchestrates the beheading of Sansa's direwolf. At Winterfell, Ned's wife, Catelyn Stark, fights off an assassin at crippled Bran's bedside. Suspicious of the Lannisters' involvement, she journeys to King's Landing to warn her husband. Bran awakens from his coma after she leaves. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Jon Snow, Ned's bastard son, heads north to the Wall—an enormous ice structure that separates the Seven Kingdoms from what's beyond, and is manned by a military order, the Night's Watch. **B+**

E.3 / **LORD SNOW**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Brian Kirk* **PLOT** In King's Landing, Lord Petyr "Littlefinger" Baelish, a former childhood friend of Catelyn, helps Lady Stark when she arrives seeking Ned. He claims Bran's would-be-assassin's dagger belongs to Tyrion. Ned and Catelyn enlist his help to find the truth. Across the Narrow Sea, Dany—now pregnant with her husband's child—bonds with exiled knight Ser Jorah Mormont as she settles into her role as Khaleesi (a Queen of the Dothraki), to her brother's annoyance. Arya begins sword-fighting classes with a renowned trainer from Braavos. **INTRODUCES** The Small Council: a conniving motley crew consisting of the king's brother, Lord Renly; the eunuch Lord Varys; Grand Maester Pycelle; and the Master of Coin, Littlefinger. **HISTORIC MOMENT** We learn that Jaime killed the "Mad King" Aerys Targaryen (Dany's father), and is therefore known as "Kingslayer." **B+**

E.4 / **CRIPPLES, BASTARDS, AND BROKEN THINGS**
WRITER *Bryan Cogman* **DIRECTOR** *Brian Kirk* **PLOT** Tyrion stops at Winterfell with a gift for paralyzed Bran: blueprints for a saddle that allows him to ride without the use of his legs. Samwell Tarly arrives at the Wall and Jon takes pity on his weakness. At King's Landing, Ned looks into the previous Hand of the King Jon Arryn's death. He meets an armorer's apprentice, Gendry, King Robert's bastard son. On the road back north, Catelyn runs into Tyrion. She accuses him of conspiring to murder her son Bran, and announces she's taking him back to Winterfell to await the King's justice. **INTRODUCES** Gendry: one legitimate heir to the throne, and the suggestion that Robert's blond-haired offspring are unlikely to have come from his "strong seed." **HISTORIC MOMENT** Dany stands up to her brother. **B**

E.5 / **THE WOLF AND THE LION**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Brian Kirk* **PLOT** Catelyn takes Tyrion to the Eyrie where her sister/Jon Arryn's widow, Lysa, resides. Lysa has become unhinged and still breastfeeds her preadolescent son. At King's Landing, Varys warns Ned that Robert's life is in jeopardy, believing Jon Arryn was poisoned. The king hears (via Jorah, who is trading secrets in exchange for a pardon) that Dany is pregnant and calls for her assassination. Ned refuses to have any part in it and gives up his position as Hand. He plans to leave for Winterfell, but first visits a brothel on Littlefinger's suggestion, where he finds another of Robert's illegitimate children. On leaving, Ned is surrounded by Jaime—angry that Catelyn has taken his brother prisoner—and his men. **INTRODUCES** Ser Loras Tyrell, the "Knight of Flowers" and Renly Baratheon's lover. **HISTORIC MOMENT** The Stark/Lannister tension comes to a head when Jaime and Ned fight, almost to the death. **B+**

E.6 / **A GOLDEN CROWN**
WRITERS *Jane Espenson, David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Daniel Minahan* **PLOT** Ned wants Jaime brought to justice for butchering his men, but Robert won't act against his source of wealth. Ned is reinstated as Hand and summons the Lannister patriarch, Tywin, to court to answer for attacking the Riverlands. Bran is set upon by Wildlings in the woods but saved by his older brother Robb and Theon. Tyrion demands a trial by combat and a champion to fight on his behalf; the mercenary Bronn volunteers, fights dirty, wins, and Tyrion is freed. Elsewhere, Dany proves herself to be one of the Dothraki by eating a horse's heart. A jealous Viserys drunkenly demands a crown from Khal Drogo. Drogo pours molten gold on Viserys' head, thereby crowning and killing him—painfully. **INTRODUCES** Osha, a Wildling who later looks after the younger Stark children. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Viserys' death proves he was no dragon; fire can't kill a dragon. **B+**

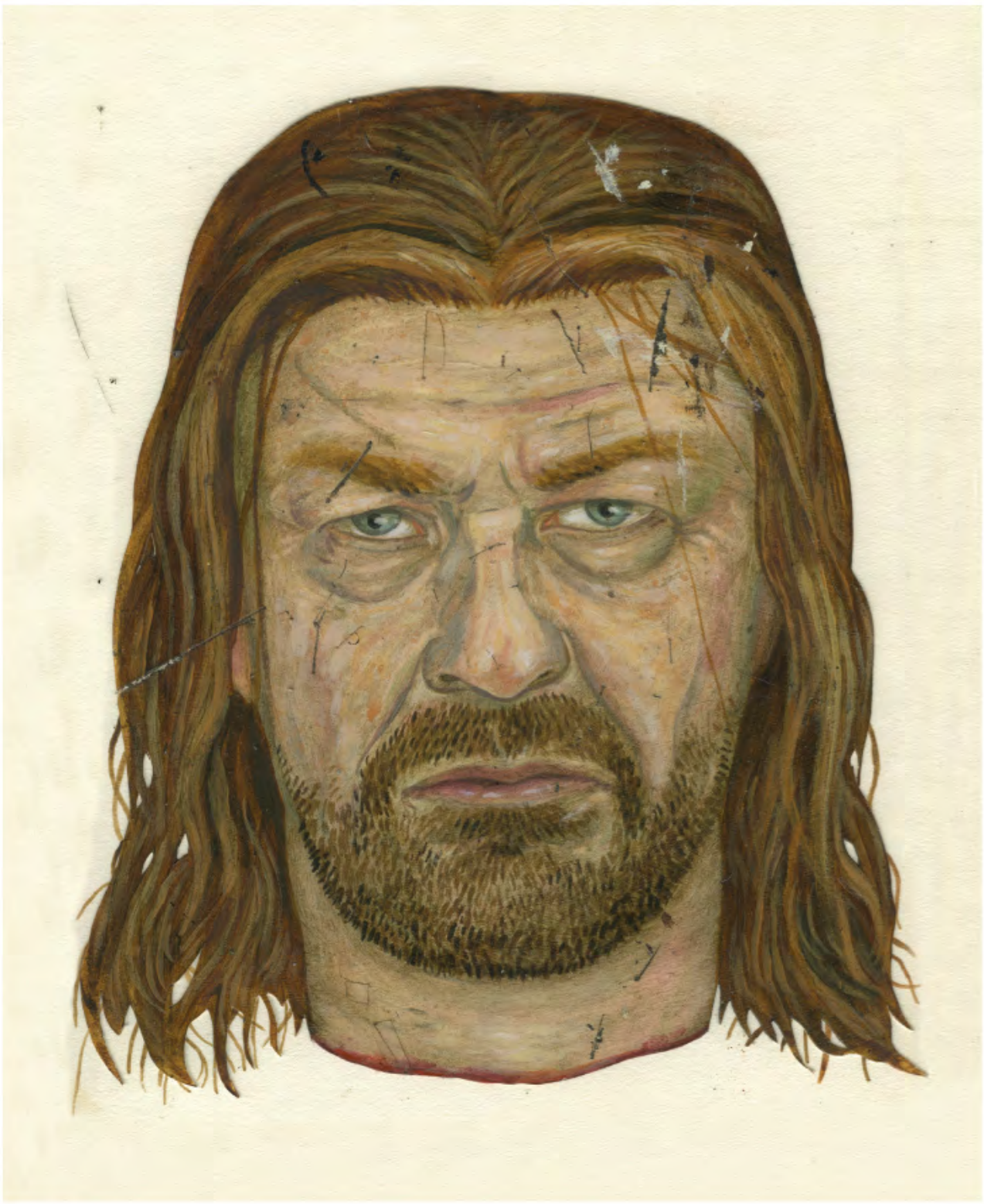
E.7 / **YOU WIN OR YOU DIE**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Daniel Minahan* **PLOT** Having discovered Cersei's children were born of incest, Ned tells her to flee and escape Robert's wrath. However, the king is maimed by a boar during a hunt and later succumbs to his injuries. Robert's dying wish—that Ned serve as Lord Regent until the king's rightful heir comes of age—is ignored by Cersei, who has Ned seized. Ned realizes Littlefinger has double-crossed him when the city guard doesn't come to his aid. Renly flees the city. Dany is saved from an assassin by Jorah, and her near-death is enough to convince Drogo to cross the sea and

Stark Family Illustration by **DIMA KASHTALYAN**

claim the throne. Benjen Stark, Ned's brother, goes missing north of the Wall, and Lord Commander Jeor Mormont (Jorah's father) requests Jon as his personal steward. **INTRODUCES** Tywin Lannister, who sends Jaime and half of his forces to attack Riverrun, thereby beginning a war. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Jon and Sam take their oath to join the Night's Watch. Jon's direwolf appears with a severed hand to add flair to the occasion. **B+**

E.8 / **THE POINTY END**
WRITER *George R.R. Martin* **DIRECTOR** *Daniel Minahan* **PLOT** After Ned's arrest, Arya narrowly escapes, and Cersei forces Sansa to write to her family, telling Robb to swear fealty to Joffrey. Robb calls for his bannermen to march on King's Landing instead. Catelyn meets Robb on the road, while Tyrion joins his father at the Lannister encampment. King Joffrey names his grandfather, Tywin, his Hand and uncle/dad, Jaime, Lord Commander of the Kingsguard. The Dothraki sack a village to help fund Drogo's throne quest. Dany saves some women from rape, and Drogo is injured defending her honor. **INTRODUCES** Sam's knowledge that White Walkers can be killed by fire. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Two dead rangers are brought back to Castle Black. They reanimate as wights (zombie-like beings), and Jon saves Commander Mormont from their attack. **B+**

E.9 / **BAELOR**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Alan Taylor* **PLOT** Robb is granted permission by the gross Lord Walder Frey to cross his fortified bridge if he marries one of Frey's daughters. Commander Mormont gifts Jon a Valyrian steel sword. Jon's loyalty to the Watch is tested when he learns Robb is marching south. Tywin's army (including Tyrion) defeats the northern men with ease, but elsewhere Robb crushes Jaime's men, taking the Kingslayer captive. Drogo is close to death from his infected wound and the Dothraki are restless, ready to claim his position as Khal. Desperate, Dany asks the "maegi" (witch) to use bloodmagic to save him and goes into premature labor. **INTRODUCES** A prostitute named Shae, for whom Tyrion falls. **HISTORIC MOMENT** In a bid to save his daughters' lives, Ned confesses to his "sins" and acknowledges Joffrey as king. Joffrey has him beheaded nonetheless. **A**



E.10 / **FIRE AND BLOOD**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Alan Taylor* **PLOT** Disguised as a boy, Arya is drafted into the Night's Watch alongside Gendry. Jon rides to meet Robb—who has just been crowned King in the North by his bannermen—but is convinced to return to the Wall by Sam & Co. The Night's Watch goes beyond the Wall to find Benjen. Dany's son dies, his life having been traded for Drogo's by the witch's spell. Drogo's tribe has left, with their leader alive but in a vegetative state. Dany smothers him with a pillow. **INTRODUCES** Jaqen H'ghar, a prisoner also recruited for the Night's Watch. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Dany burns Drogo's body, her dragon eggs, and the witch. She climbs onto the pyre herself, later emerging from the ash unscathed, holding three baby dragons: Drogon, Rhaegal, and Viserion. **A**

SEASON 2

E.1 / **THE NORTH REMEMBERS**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Alan Taylor* **PLOT** Tyrion arrives in King's Landing and informs everyone that Tywin—busy with war—has named him acting Hand, much to Cersei's dismay. An order goes out to murder all of Robert's bastards, but Gendry is already on the road north. Dany and the Dothraki—accompanied by her freshly hatched dragons—are struggling in the Red Waste, so she sends riders in three separate directions in search of life. The Night's Watch crew arrive at creepy Craster's home and meet all of his

Ned Stark Illustration by **JASON HOLLEY** ◆ *Spot Illustrations by* **BENE ROHLMANN**

daughters/wives. In Dragonstone, Red Priestess Melisandre converts Stannis Baratheon, Robert's brother, to the ways of the Lord of Light. Stannis' knight Davos Seaworth is not a Melisandre fan and wants Stannis to make peace with his brother Renly or join Robb Stark, but Stannis, rightful heir to the throne, takes a hard pass. He also sends ravens with the news that Cersei's children are Jaime's. Robb sends Catelyn to ask Renly to join them, and Theon offers to secure them ships from his dad. **INTRODUCES** Stannis; Melisandre; Davos; Salladhor Saan, the pirate who joins Team Stannis; and Craster and his daughters, including Gilly, who connects with Sam. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Melisandre's "The night is dark and full of terrors." **B+**

E.2 / **THE NIGHT LANDS**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Alan Taylor* **PLOT** Theon heads home to the Iron Islands and promptly hits on his sister, Yara, not recognizing her after so many years away. His cranky father, Balon, is unimpressed by his returning son and says he's not joining Robb's—or anyone's—army. Arya admits to Gendry that she's Ned's daughter. In King's Landing, Tyrion is nervous that Shae has met with Varys, and a raven arrives with word of the White Walkers. **INTRODUCES** Yara and Balon Greyjoy. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Jon sees a baby boy abandoned in the woods by Craster and taken by a White Walker. **B+**

E.3 / **WHAT IS DEAD MAY NEVER DIE**
WRITER *Bryan Cogman* **DIRECTOR** *Alik Sakharov* **PLOT** Jon shares the horrifying news of Craster's baby sacrifices with Commander Mormont, who already knew. Catelyn visits Renly in hopes of forging an alliance. Renly later has trouble forging an alliance with wife Margaery Tyrell in the bedroom; she helpfully offers to invite her brother, Loras, in to assist. Tyrion assigns Shae to be Sansa's handmaiden and orders Cersei's daughter, Myrcella, to Dorne to be married. Arya saves H'ghar's and Gendry's lives from Lannister bannermen. **INTRODUCES** Brienne of Tarth, who defeats Loras in a match and is invited to join Renly's guard. **HISTORIC MOMENT** In a move that proves to be bad news for a lot of people—most of all himself—Theon chooses a side, pledging allegiance to the Iron Islands. **B+**

E.4 / **GARDEN OF BONES**
WRITER *Vanessa Taylor* **DIRECTOR** *David Petrarca* **PLOT** In King's Landing, Joffrey rains more cruelty on Sansa and a pair of prostitutes. Tyrion enlists his sister's young lover (and cousin, natch), Lancel Lannister, to spy on Cersei. Arya and Gendry wind up prisoners at the very bleak Harrenhal, where Tywin puts Arya to work as a cupbearer since he knows she's a girl. Dany and her road-weary crew are, eventually, welcomed into the gorgeous city of Qarth. The remaining Baratheon bros. meet and come to no peace accord. **INTRODUCES** The ominous smoke monster that Melisandre gives "birth" to in a cave; and Roose Bolton, one of Robb's generals. **HISTORIC MOMENT** It's love at first sight *GoT*-style as Robb assists headstrong field nurse Talisa in an amputation. **B**

E.5 / **THE GHOST OF HARRENHAL**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *David Petrarca* **PLOT** Catelyn is conferring with Renly when, to her and Brienne's horror, Melisandre's shadow monster enters the tent and kills him. The women flee and Brienne pledges her service to Catelyn. Loras and Margaery also flee, as Stannis' troops arrive and Renly's men switch their allegiance to him. Tyrion gets a load of the wildfire Cersei is having cooked up in King's Landing; Dany turns down a proposal of marriage in Qarth; and absolutely everybody dunks on Theon, who was given one ship and gets the (not-so-)bright idea to take Winterfell, which triggers Bran's dream of the sea crashing into his home. **INTRODUCES** Qhorin Halfhand, a Night's Watch ranger whom Jon joins on a mission to investigate the Wildling army. **HISTORIC MOMENT** H'ghar offers to kill three people for Arya in exchange for the lives, including his, that she saved. **B+**

E.6 / **THE OLD GODS AND THE NEW**
WRITER *Vanessa Taylor* **DIRECTOR** *David Nutter* **PLOT** Theon takes Winterfell in the most honor-free way imaginable, and with no foresight for strategy. Osha manages to escape with Bran, his brother Rickon, and a servant, Hodor; Jon and Qhorin come face to face with some Wildlings, including a particularly fierce redhead. In King's Landing, Joffrey's bodyguard, the Hound, rescues Sansa from a melee when a crowd rises up against the king. At Harrenhal, H'ghar takes a second man's life, helping Arya narrowly avoid Tywin discovering she's a Stark. Roose tells Robb he'll send his bastard to take Winterfell back from Theon. In Qarth, there's a grand theft dragon! **INTRODUCES** Ygritte, the aforementioned redhead. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Ygritte's first, but not last, great Jon Snow zinger: "You're brave. Stupid, but brave." **B+**

E.7 / **A MAN WITHOUT HONOR**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *David Nutter* **PLOT** Unable to carry out Qhorin's order to kill Ygritte, Jon finds himself captured by her Wildling pals. When Theon discovers Bran and Rickon have escaped Winterfell, he kills two local boys and burns their bodies to display as decoys; he feels bad, but also needs to assert himself. A frantic Dany searches for her dragons in Qarth, blood is shed. In King's Landing, Sansa is distraught to discover she has gotten her first period, which means she can now bear Joffrey's children. Meanwhile, Jaime—still in Robb's custody—kills his cousin in an (ultimately botched) escape attempt. During a chat about history, Tywin deduces that Arya is highborn and says she reminds him of Cersei. **INTRODUCES** The interior of the House of the Undying. **HISTORIC MOMENT** "You know nothing, Jon Snow." **B+**

E.8 / **THE PRINCE OF WINTERFELL**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Alan Taylor* **PLOT** Yara is not impressed with Theon taking a castle so far from the sea and "killing" the strategically valuable Stark children. Both captured, Qhorin tells Jon he should kill him so the Wildlings will trust him. Robb talks marriage—and gets up close and personal—with Talisa. He also discovers that Catelyn sent Jaime off with Brienne to swap for her daughters, believing Cersei has them both. So naturally, Robb arrests his mother. In the bowels of Winterfell, Osha reveals to Stark loyalist Maester Luwin that she, the boys, and Hodor doubled back. Arya, Gendry, and their

Melisandre Illustration by **JODY HEWGILL**

THE MOST Gruesome Deaths

VISERYS TARGARYEN

Daenerys' older brother (Harry Lloyd) finally got the crown that he always wanted—when Khal Drogo poured a pot of molten gold on his head.

SHIREEN BARATHEON

As his wife watchesd, Stannis sacrificed his only child (Kerry Ingram) to the Lord of Light, burning her alive.

RODRIK CASSEL

Plenty of heads have rolled on *Thrones*, but none took as much effort as Winterfell's Master-at-Arms (Ron Donachie).

TALISA STARK

While the entire Red Wedding could make the list, the toughest cut was Robb Stark's pregnant wife (Oona Chaplin), who was stabbed multiple times in the stomach.

OBERYN MARTELL

The Mountain punched out Oberyn's (Pedro Pascal) teeth and pushed in his eyes, crushing his skull.

MERYN TRANT

Arya checked Trant (Ian Beattie) off her kill list by infiltrating a brothel and stabbing him in the eyes and chest before slitting his throat.

Shireen being prepared for sacrifice

friend Hot Pie escape Harrenhal thanks to H'ghar's final murder on Arya's behalf. Tyrion is rightfully worried that Joffrey, and King's Landing, are not prepared for the fight with Stannis' approaching fleet. **INTRODUCES** How Davos got the nickname "Onion Knight." **HISTORIC MOMENT** The start of the Brienne and Jaime road show. **B+**

E.9 / **BLACKWATER**
WRITER *George R.R. Martin* **DIRECTOR** *Neil Marshall* **PLOT** The Battle of Blackwater is now upon King's Landing. Tyrion's many strategies, including the deployment of wildfire to fend off approaching ships, turn out to be (gruesome) winners. A cowardly Joffrey scuttles away when the tides begin to turn, leaving Tyrion to rally the troops to hold the line: "Those are brave men knocking at our door, let's go kill them." All hope seems like it might be lost, and just as Tyrion is injured—by one of his own men—he sees Tywin leading a fresh army to the rescue. Sitting on the Iron Throne, Cersei is poised to poison her youngest son, Tommen, should the keep be breached, but is relieved when a triumphant Tywin strides into the throne room. **INTRODUCES/HISTORIC MOMENT** Wildfire in action. **A+**

E.10 / **VALAR MORGHULIS**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Alan Taylor* **PLOT** Victory's spoils include Tywin becoming Hand to Joffrey again, Littlefinger being awarded Harrenhal, and Margaery receiving the booby prize of marrying the king. Tyrion, now essentially powerless, nurses his wounds and the knowledge that Cersei orchestrated the attack on him. Robb secretly marries Talisa while the *Brienne & Jaime Show* continues apace; Roose's bastard son seizes Winterfell from Theon; and Bran and the gang head for the Wall. Dany is reunited with her dragons in Qarth. H'ghar gives Arya a coin that will help summon him. Back at Dragonstone, Stannis is mad at Melisandre, since he lost the battle. She continues to tell him he'll be king and entrances him with fire. Qhorin goads Jon into killing him, and the Wildlings free him. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Three horns sound: the White Walkers—a whole lot of them—are on the move. **B+**

SEASON 3

E.1 / **VALAR DOHAERIS**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Daniel Minahan* **PLOT** Sam's watch almost ends at the hands of a wight, but Jon's direwolf and Commander Mormont come to his rescue. Also still alive is Davos, who survived the Battle of the Blackwater and returns to Dragonstone, where he unsuccessfully tries to kill Melisandre. In Astapor, Dany is considering purchasing a group of eunuch slave soldiers known as the Unsullied. **INTRODUCES** Missandei, a slave who helps broker the Unsullied deal; the King Beyond the Wall, Mance Rayder, and his trusted Wildling warrior Tormund. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Ser Barristan Selmy, a banished member of the King's Landing Kingsguard, pops up just in time to prevent Dany from being assassinated. **B**

E.2 / **DARK WINGS, DARK WORDS**
WRITER *Vanessa Taylor* **DIRECTOR** *Daniel Minahan* **PLOT** It's bad news for Catelyn and Robb: Her father is dead and Winterfell has been ransacked, with no sign of Bran or Rickon. And Catelyn's hope of a reunion with Arya and Sansa hits a speed bump when a duel between Brienne and Jaime ends with their discovery by a Bolton bannerman, Locke. **INTRODUCES** Jojen Reed, a seer who tracks down Bran, and his sister Meera; Margaery's grandmother, Lady Olenna Tyrell, who summons Sansa; and an unnamed boy who promises to free Theon, who has been taken hostage after losing Winterfell. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Bran learns that he has been sharing dreams with Jojen. **B–**

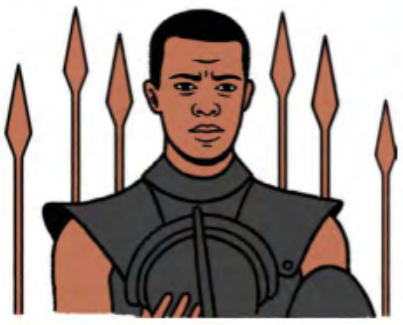
E.3 / **WALK OF PUNISHMENT**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *David Benioff* **PLOT** Littlefinger is set to marry Lysa, meaning Tyrion will be the new Master of Coin. Dany isn't spending coin on the Unsullied; instead, she offers a dragon in exchange for the soldiers and Missandei. It's a big episode for boys, as Gilly gives birth to one, while the unnamed boy frees Theon and later saves him from those trying to recapture him. Brienne and Jaime are far from free; after Jaime convinces Locke not to rape Brienne, he tries to secure his own release. **INTRODUCES** Gilly's son, baby Sam; Catelyn's brother Edmure Tully and uncle Brynden ("the Blackfish"), with whom Robb and his mother discuss strategy in Riverrun. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Jaime's hand is chopped off. **A–**

E.4 / **AND NOW HIS WATCH IS ENDED**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Alex Graves* **PLOT** Theon confesses to the unnamed boy that he didn't kill Bran and Rickon; he saw Ned as his father and he regrets the betrayal. The betrayals continue when the boy leads Theon right back to his captors. At Craster's Keep, the Night's Watch men have tired of the conditions and kill both Craster and Commander Mormont, leading Sam to make a run for it with Gilly and her son. **INTRODUCES** The beginning of Theon's long captivity under the soon-to-be-revealed Ramsay Snow. **HISTORIC MOMENT** In Astapor, Dany shockingly reveals that she speaks Valyrian, ordering her dragon and the Unsullied to slay the masters and free the slaves. Her act inspires the Unsullied to fight for her as free men. **B+**

E.5 / **KISSED BY FIRE**
WRITER *Bryan Cogman* **DIRECTOR** *Alex Graves* **PLOT** Tywin orders Tyrion to marry Sansa and Cersei to marry Loras, while Jaime tells Brienne his side of the Kingslayer tale, sharing that the Mad King was going to burn down the city. The Hound, who has been captured by a group known as the Brotherhood Without Banners (men who've sworn to protect all smallfolk), gets the chance to win his freedom in a trial by combat. He wins by killing their leader, Beric, who is then brought back to life by Red Priest Thoros. Off in another cave, Jon sleeps with Ygritte, proving that he does know

GAME OF THRONES: HELEN SLOAN/HBO

something. Elsewhere, Robb's decision to execute a former ally, Rickard Karstark, for killing two young Lannisters costs him the Karstark forces. **INTRODUCES** Unsullied leader Grey Worm. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Jon Snow breaking his Night's Watch oath for love. **A–**



E.6 / **THE CLIMB**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Alik Sakharov* **PLOT** Jon and the Wildlings climb the Wall and, after barely making it to the top, he and Ygritte share a romantic kiss. Meanwhile, Robb is paying for his romantic decision as he tries to get the help of Walder Frey. The old man says he'll join forces if Robb apologizes for not marrying one of his daughters; Uncle Edmure takes on the obligation. Over in King's Landing, Littlefinger departs without Sansa. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Melisandre learns of Beric's many revivals. **B**

E.7 / **THE BEAR AND THE MAIDEN FAIR**
WRITER *George R.R. Martin* **DIRECTOR** *Michelle MacLaren* **PLOT** Theon's torture reaches new levels of cruelty when he's turned into a eunuch. Jaime, no stranger to losing a limb, is being escorted to King's Landing—but without Brienne, who he learns won't be ransomed. He rushes back to Harrenhal, rescuing her from a face-off with a bear, and eventually secures her release. Dany, fresh off freeing the Unsullied, now has her eyes set on Yunkai, home to 200,000 slaves. **INTRODUCES** The beginning of Arya and the Hound's very long road trip. **HISTORIC MOMENT** As Roose heads for Edmure's wedding, Jaime asks him to pass a message along to Robb: "The Lannisters send their regards." **B–**

E.8 / **SECOND SONS**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Michelle MacLaren* **PLOT** The big day has arrived for Sansa and Tyrion. After Joffrey humiliates his uncle during the wedding, the reception becomes even more tense as a drunk Tyrion refuses to participate in the bedding ceremony. Once the newlyweds return to their room, Tyrion says they won't share a bed until Sansa is ready. In Dragonstone, Gendry is sharing a bed with Melisandre, who uses leeches to extract his king's blood, a ritual intended to bring down Robb, Joffrey, and Balon. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Sam learns the power of dragonglass when his dagger causes a White Walker to disintegrate. **INTRODUCES** Daario Naharis, who kills his fellow Second Sons leaders and pledges allegiance to Dany. **A–**

E.9 / **THE RAINS OF CASTAMERE**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *David Nutter* **PLOT** Jon and Bran almost reunite when the Wildlings attempt to kill Jon, but he's saved when Bran wargs (projects his consciousness) into his direwolf, Summer. Jon escapes, leaving Ygritte behind. Rickon leaves too, as Osha takes him to safety. **HISTORIC MOMENT** This episode is known as the "Red Wedding," in reference to the end of Edmure and Roslin Frey's wedding reception, which goes from cheery to bloody when a pregnant Talisa is stabbed in the stomach, followed by the Stark bannermen being slaughtered and Robb getting shot with arrows. Catelyn tries to bargain for her son's life by threatening Walder Frey's wife, but the old man is unmoved, and Roose stabs Robb. Crying, Catelyn slits Mrs. Frey's throat right before her own is cut. **A**

E.10 / **MHYSA**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *David Nutter* **PLOT** Arya just missed the Red Wedding, but she did see the aftermath and kills a man who bragged about being involved. Yara sets out to rescue her brother, just as Cersei reunites with Jaime. While Dany is freeing slaves in Yunkai, Davos frees Gendry, and only avoids death by sharing Maester Aemon's letter from the Wall about the White Walkers, which is backed up by Melisandre seeing the war to come in the fire. The warning is due to the return of Sam and Jon, the latter shot by Ygritte. **INTRODUCES** The boy torturing Theon is finally revealed to be Roose's bastard, Ramsay. Just as we learn his name, he gives Theon a new one: Reek. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Dany being called "mother" and carried on the shoulders of the freed Yunkai slaves. **B**

SEASON 4

E.1 / **TWO SWORDS**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *D.B. Weiss* **PLOT** Already down a hand, Jaime also loses Cersei (who tells him that she's moved on during his long absence from King's Landing) and his father's favor (since he refuses to leave the Kingsguard to rule as heir of Casterly Rock). The Wildlings are wilding out with Ygritte, who is *still* hung up on Jon, even after trying to kill him. Jon's in the same boat, healing from his Ygritte-inflicted wounds. Arya and the Hound are back traveling together and discover the men who took her sword, Needle. And Dany continues her very long road trip with her dragons. **INTRODUCES** Sexually fluid fighter Oberyn Martell, who comes to King's Landing to secretly exact revenge against the Lannisters for the rape and murder of his sister. **B**

E.2 / **THE LION AND THE ROSE**
WRITER *George R.R. Martin* **DIRECTOR** *Alex Graves* **PLOT** Joffrey weds Margaery, with one big complication. (More on that in a moment.) Roose scolds Ramsay for carving the humanity—and a lot more—out of Theon; Melisandre sacrifices three people as an offering to the Lord of Light before joining Stannis and his wife for a tense meal; and Jaime begins the arduous task of training himself to sword fight with one hand. **INTRODUCES** The Night King, leader of the White Walkers, who appears in a vision that Bran has while communing with a Weirwood Heart tree. **HISTORIC MOMENTS** Joffrey finally gets his just desserts and is poisoned at his wedding, dying in supremely gruesome fashion. Further complicating the Lannister family dynamic, Cersei accuses Tyrion of murdering her son. In an attempt to protect Shae from Tywin's revenge plot against him, Tyrion breaks things off with his lover. **A**

Joffrey Baratheon Illustration by **NIGEL BUCAHANAN**

E.3 / **BREAKER OF CHAINS**

WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Alex Graves* **PLOT** Joffrey's body still warm, Tywin prepares young Tommen to be king—but all Tommen wants to do is hang with his cat, Ser Pounce. Tyrion's upcoming trial gets its witnesses. Littlefinger spirits Sansa out of King's Landing. Sam moves Gilly to a nearby town and away from the Night's Watch men, who only see her as a Wildling. **INTRODUCES** Daario as Dany's champion. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Jaime forces himself on Cersei, an act in the books that was consensual. (The scene launched complicated discussions around how the show handles rape.) **C**

E.4 / **OATHKEEPER**

WRITER *Bryan Cogman* **DIRECTOR** *Michelle MacLaren* **PLOT** Jaime asks Brienne to fulfill his promise to Catelyn: find and protect Sansa. Speaking of, Littlefinger is taking the eldest Stark daughter to her aunt Lysa's and explains that he was involved in Joffrey's murder, in part to confuse the Lannisters and get her out of King's Landing. Dany, despite her advisers' objections, orders the killing of Meereen's "Great Masters" in retaliation for the deaths of 163 slave children. **INTRODUCES** What the Night King does to Craster's baby boys: turns them into White Walkers with the flick of his lengthy nail. **A**

E.5 / **FIRST OF HIS NAME**

WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Michelle MacLaren* **PLOT** Tommen is crowned king. Cersei begrudingly gets plans rolling for Tommen and Margaery's wedding, as well as her own to Loras—a beneficial meeting of the Lannister and Tyrell houses. Dany decides to stay and rule in Slaver's Bay despite the news about Joffrey. Upon Littlefinger's arrival at the Eyrie, Lysa insists that they promptly wed. Beyond the Wall, Bran and his crew are seized by Bolton's bannermen. Coincidentally, Jon attacks the traitorous men but never sees his brother. Bran wargs into Hodor, using the servant to kill their captor; he is convinced to leave without reuniting with Jon. He *must* reach the Three-Eyed Raven. **INTRODUCES** Arya's "kill list" (now an iconic meme), which she explains to the Hound—and reveals that he's on it as well. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Sansa learns about Littlefinger's long history with the Stark women from Lysa, who informs her he was in love with Catelyn. **B**

E.6 / **THE LAWS OF GODS AND MEN**

WRITER *Bryan Cogman* **DIRECTOR** *Alik Sakharov* **PLOT** Tyrion's trial gets messy quickly: Behind the scenes, Jaime pleads for Tyrion's life, and his father (serving as judge alongside Margaery's father, Mace Tyrell, and Oberyn) acquiesces and offers his younger son the lesser punishment of banishment to the Night's Watch, as long as he confesses guilt and pleads for mercy. Tyrion is wary of trusting Tywin's word but seems willing to play ball, until Shae is called as a witness and lies, testifying that Tyrion and Sansa planned and executed Joffrey's murder. Hurt and outraged, Tyrion lashes out, proclaiming his hatred of Joffrey—and all of King's Landing, for that matter—and, refusing to let his judges determine his fate, demands a trial by combat. Elsewhere, one of Dany's dragons attacks some goats, Yara attempts to save Theon—who is beyond salvation—and Stannis campaigns for funds to raise a large army. **INTRODUCES** The shell that was formerly Theon is now Reek through and through. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Tyrion's big speech: "I did not kill Joffrey, but I wish that I had! Watching your vicious bastard die gave me more relief than a thousand lying whores! I wish I was the monster you think I am. I wish I had enough poison for the whole pack of you. I would gladly give my life to watch you all swallow it." **A**

Ygritte Illustration by **PHIL NOTO**

E.7 / **MOCKINGBIRD**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Alik Sakharov* **PLOT** Oberyn offers to be Tyrion's champion in the trial by combat because Cersei's champion is the Hound's brother, the Mountain, who killed Oberyn's sister. Dany and Daario finally give in to their sexual tension. Then the Khaleesi sends her lover and his men to Yunkai to regain control over the city, and kill the masters who have resurfaced—all of this much to Jorah's dismay. Over some kidney pie, Brienne and her squire, Podrick, meet Hot Pie, who informs them that Arya is alive and with the Hound. The duo head off toward the Eyrie, where they hypothesize that Arya is being taken to be ransomed to her aunt Lysa. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Lysa becomes hysterical after seeing her new groom surprise her niece with a kiss. In the ensuing fight, Littlefinger pushes Lysa through the Moon Door to her death. **B**

E.8 / **THE MOUNTAIN AND THE VIPER**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Alex Graves* **PLOT** Reek is back to being Theon!... But just as a ploy: Ramsay takes advantage of his plaything's former identity to trick the Ironborn into surrendering Moat Cailin, providing his father's army safe passage home. When the Wildlings attack a town near the Wall, Ygritte discovers Gilly hiding with her baby and urges them to keep quiet, sparing their lives. Littlefinger is questioned about Lysa's demise, but Sansa comes to his defense, claiming that her aunt threw herself to her death. When asked why she lied to help him, Sansa basically says it's better for her to stay with the devil she knows than the devil she doesn't. In Meereen, Ser Selmy intercepts a royal pardon for Jorah signed by King Robert, and realizes Jorah was spying on Dany. Jorah—fully devoted to his queen—pleads for forgiveness and says the notice was sent by Tywin in an attempt to sabotage Dany, but she banishes him anyway. **INTRODUCES** Ramsay Snow as Ramsay Bolton, a name change granted to the bastard by his father after his victory at Moat Cailin, and the beginnings of Grey Worm and Missandei's romance. **HISTORIC MOMENT** The battle between the Mountain and Oberyn. The fight ends with the sickening sounds of Oberyn's skull being crushed by the Mountain, leading to Tyrion's death sentence. **A+**

E.9 / **THE WATCHERS ON THE WALL**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Neil Marshall* **PLOT** The Wildlings' attack on the Wall brings Ygritte and Jon together again. Jon, with Sam's help, manages to defend the Wall and the castle, but at a pretty big cost. **INTRODUCES** Mammoths! **HISTORIC MOMENT** Jon and Ygritte have a moment during the battle, but in that pause she's struck by an arrow and dies in Jon's arms. **A**

E.10 / **THE CHILDREN**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Alex Graves* **PLOT** Jon heads to the Wildling camp with plans to kill Mance, but is interrupted by Stannis, who takes the Wildlings captive and sets up camp with the Night's Watch. Brienne finds Arya and severely wounds the Hound. He begs Arya for mercy, but she leaves him to die slowly. After a Meereen child is killed by Drogon, Dany realizes she has to lock her babies up. Fighting her father's order to marry Loras, Cersei plays her trump card: She reveals to Tywin that the rumors of incest are true and threatens to take it public. Triumphant, she reunites with Jaime, and the two further solidify the truth behind her threat. **INTRODUCES** The Children of the Forest, the original beings to inhabit Westeros, one of whom rescues Bran, Meera, and Hodor (sadly, not Jojen) from wights just before they meet the Three-Eyed Raven; as well as the knowledge that Oberyn poisoned the spear that pierced the Mountain, ensuring his death. **HISTORIC MOMENTS** After Jaime helps him escape, Tyrion finds Shae in Tywin's room and strangles her for her betrayal; he then shoots Tywin (on the toilet!) with Joffrey's crossbow before escaping. **A**

SEASON 5

E.1 / **THE WARS TO COME**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Michael Slovis* **PLOT** The balance of power starts to readjust in the wake of Tywin's death. Up north, Stannis fails to persuade the Wildlings to join his army and march on Winterfell. Across the sea, Varys tries to convince a drunk Tyrion to throw his support behind Dany, who is currently struggling with the politics of ruling. Down south, Cersei and Jaime grieve their father's passing as Margaery plots to pull herself out from under the former's thumb. **INTRODUCES** Flashbacks! When Cersei was younger, a witch prophesized that all of her children would die and her reign as queen wouldn't last. Yikes! **HISTORIC MOMENT** Stannis burns Mance at the stake for refusing to bend the knee. **B**

E.2 / **THE HOUSE OF BLACK AND WHITE**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Michael Slovis* **PLOT** Brienne runs into Sansa (and Littlefinger) at an inn and offers her protection, but Sansa, like her sister Arya before her, rejects her help. Nevertheless, Brienne resolves to follow her, just in case. Jaime recruits Bronn to travel to Dorne and rescue his and Cersei's daughter, Myrcella. **INTRODUCES** The titular House of Black and White (a.k.a. the house of the Faceless Men), where Arya is reunited with H'ghar. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Jon is elected Lord Commander of the Night's Watch. **B+**

E.3 / **HIGH SPARROW**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Mark Mylod* **PLOT** All about the Starks! H'ghar forces Arya to discard all of her personal belongings, while Jon's tenure as Lord Commander begins with him executing an insubordinate guard. In Volantis, Mormont recognizes Tyrion in a brothel and kidnaps him as a present for Dany, unknowingly helping the wayward Lannister. In King's Landing, Margaery and Tommen get married and waste no time consummating their union. (Ew.) **INTRODUCES** The Waif, an assistant to the Faceless Men; the High Sparrow, leader of a fanatic religious order and the future leader of the Faith Militant. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Sansa returns to Winterfell for the first time since the first season because Littlefinger has arranged for her to marry the abusive Ramsay, a.k.a. the son of the man who killed her brother Robb. **B**

E.4 / **SONS OF THE HARPY**
WRITER *Dave Hill* **DIRECTOR** *Mark Mylod* **PLOT** Reactionary and rebellious groups become bolder in both King's Landing—where Cersei empowers the Sparrows to arrest sinners, including Loras—and in Meereen, where the Sons of the Harpy launch a devastating attack on the Unsullied. Less interestingly, Jaime and Bronn land in Dorne as the Sand Snakes (Oberyn's bastard daughters) plot to kidnap Myrcella. **INTRODUCES** Jaime learns that his gold hand can be an effective tool in combat. Yay, more making it work! **HISTORIC MOMENT** Ser Selmy perishes while fighting the Sons of the Harpy, a group of former slavers who oppose Dany's rule over Meereen. **B**

E.5 / **KILL THE BOY**
WRITER *Bryan Cogman* **DIRECTOR** *Jeremy Podeswa* **PLOT** In the wake of the Sons of the Harpy's violence, Dany lets her anger get the better of her and feeds a nobleman to her dragons. But after some thinking, she decides to compromise and agrees to reopen the fighting pits to free men—and to marry one of the city's nobles as a sign of goodwill. Jon also makes nice with enemies: At the Wall, he persuades Tormund to take him to meet the rest of the Wildlings to negotiate a truce, much to the rest of the Night's Watch's dismay. **HISTORIC MOMENTS** Tyrion sees his first dragon right before he and Jorah are attacked by the diseased Stone Men. Unfortunately, one of the infected attackers manages to touch Jorah. At Winterfell, Sansa comes face-to-face with Theon. **B+**

E.6 / **UNBOWED, UNBENT, UNBROKEN**
WRITER *Bryan Cogman* **DIRECTOR** *Jeremy Podeswa* **PLOT** At Cersei's urging, the Faith Militant begin an inquest and arrest Margaery for lying about her brother's homosexuality. Similarly, the Dornish guards break up Jaime and Bronn's tussle with the Sand

WHATEVER Happened TO...

SALLADHOR SAAN

Known on the internet as the "Sex Pirate," Saan (Lucian Msamati) was such a scene-stealer, it's hard to believe he appeared in only three episodes. Here's hoping that Davos' mercenary pal eventually makes it to King's Landing for his shot at seducing Cersei.

SER ILYN PAYNE

Ned Stark's executioner has been absent since season 2 due to Wilko Johnson's cancer diagnosis. But following a successful surgery, the English musician-actor is now cancer-free and hopefully available to return so Arya can exact her revenge.

SYRIO FOREL

Arya's beloved "dance" instructor (Miltos Yerolemou) taught her how to wield a sword. Arya believes he was killed by now-deceased Meryn Trant, but we never saw a body.

ILLYRIO MOPATIS

The name might not ring any bells, but Mopatis (Roger Allam) is the critical character who gifted Daenerys the three dragon eggs.

Dancing lessons: Syrio and Arya

Snakes and throws the lot of them in jail. Meanwhile, slavers capture Tyrion and Jorah; however, Tyrion convinces them to let Jorah fight for his freedom (and money) in the pits in Meereen. **INTRODUCES** After weeks of cleaning corpses—and failing at lying—Arya is finally shown the chamber where the faces are kept in the House of Black and White. **HISTORIC MOMENT** This is more meta-textual, but the critiques of the show's gratuitous use of violence against women came to a boiling point after Ramsay raped Sansa on their wedding night while a horrified Theon looked on. **C+**

E.7 / **THE GIFT**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Miguel Sapochnik* **PLOT** Sansa asks Theon to help her send a message to her allies, but Theon snitches to Ramsay, who flays one of her allies. Cersei visits Margaery in prison, mostly to gloat, but Cersei's fortunes take a turn when the High Sparrow reveals that he knows about her incestuous relationship with Lancel and has her arrested. In other words, the Queen Mother played herself by empowering the Faith Militant. **INTRODUCES** Meereen's fighting pits, where Tyrion finally meets the Mother of Dragons. **HISTORIC MOMENTS** Maester Aemon dies; Sam loses his virginity to Gilly. **B+**

E.8 / **HARDHOME**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Miguel Sapochnik* **PLOT** As a bitter Cersei languishes away in a cell, her brother Tyrion enjoys an audience with Dany, who decides to bring him on as an advisor and banishes Jorah once again. H'ghar sends Arya on her first mission for the Many-Faced God, and Theon reveals to Sansa that he lied about killing her two brothers, who, unless you forgot, don't appear in season 5 at all. **HISTORIC MOMENTS** Jon and Tormund meet with the Wildlings and convince many of them to join their alliance—which is immediately tested when an army of wights attacks Hardhome as the two groups are boarding ships to return to Castle Black. During the battle, Jon discovers that Valyrian steel can shatter a White Walker. As he sails away, he witnesses the Night King resurrect the fallen as wights. **A**

E.9 / **THE DANCE OF DRAGONS**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *David Nutter* **PLOT** In Dorne, Oberyn's older brother—Prince Doran Martell—grants Jaime, Myrcella, and Bronn safe passage back to King's Landing. And in Braavos, Arya crosses paths with another name on her kill list: Meryn Trant, the pedophilic knight of the Kingsguard who murdered her sword teacher. **HISTORIC MOMENTS** Drogon, who's been mostly MIA, returns to protect his Dany when the Sons of the Harpy attempt to assassinate her on opening day of the fighting pits. And after Ramsay launches a sneak attack on Stannis' camp, Stannis sees no option other than to follow Melisandre's advice: he makes the heartbreaking choice to sacrifice his daughter, Shireen, on a pyre in order to assure his victory over the Boltons at Winterfell. **B+**

E.10 / **MOTHER'S MERCY**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *David Nutter* **PLOT** Drogon drops Dany off in the middle of nowhere and she ends up getting captured by a horde of Dothraki riders, which can't be good news. Oberyn's lover, Ellaria Sand, murders Doran and poisons young Myrcella, who dies in her uncle/father's arms on their ship bound for King's Landing. And Sansa and Theon use the cover of Ramsay and Stannis' battle to jump off the ramparts and escape Winterfell. **INTRODUCES** Blind Arya, who loses her sight because she violated the Faceless Men's rules by killing Trant. **HISTORIC MOMENTS** Where to begin? First off, Cersei endures her *shameful* and humiliating walk through the streets of King's Landing after confessing to her sins. Then Brienne fulfills her oath to Renly and kills Stannis, whose army was demolished by the Bolton forces. Finally, the Night's Watch turn on Jon and murder him for allowing the Wildlings to cross south of the Wall. **B+**

SEASON 6

E.1 / **THE RED WOMAN**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Jeremy Podeswa* **PLOT** Jon Snow is dead! His stabbed corpse is discovered by a group of people, including Davos and a few other allies. They drag him inside and plot to kill the traitorous Alliser Thorne. Elsewhere, Cersei reunites with Jaime and subsequently learns of her daughter's death (and vows revenge—a twofer this episode!). Meanwhile, Sansa and Theon are on the run from Ramsay's men when they're saved by Podrick and Brienne, the latter of whom Sansa invites into her service. **INTRODUCES** New Dothraki, including warrior Qhono, capture Dany and take her to their leader, Khal Moro. **HISTORIC MOMENT** The otherwise-table-setting "Red Woman" ends on the quietly shocking image of Melisandre—called in to revive Jon—removing her necklace to reveal her true self for the first time in the mirror: a (very) frail old woman. **B**

E.2 / **HOME**
WRITER *Dave Hill* **DIRECTOR** *Jeremy Podeswa* **PLOT** Jon Snow is alive! The show rather dutifully approaches this inevitable plot turn, weaving Melisandre's personal crisis into the plot to resurrect him. She gets to work on Davos' ask, and initially her efforts appear unsuccessful—until everyone leaves the room. Arya reunites with the Faceless Men, while Tyrion tensely unchains Dany's dragons (in a terrific sequence), and Bran's Greensight apprenticeship with the Three-Eyed Raven proves taxing for Meera. Roose and his wife, Walda Bolton, die at the hands of Ramsay, who also murders their son/his baby brother. Balon is also killed by his brother Euron. **INTRODUCES** Ned's sister, Lyanna, in a flashback to happier Winterfell times, viewed by Bran. **HISTORIC MOMENT** The iconic final shot of Jon opening his eyes. **B–**

E.3 / **OATHBREAKER**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Daniel Sackheim* **PLOT** A stunned Davos discovers Jon alive and well. Jon—who remembers being stabbed but nothing from his time unconscious—reclaims

GAME OF THRONES: HELEN SLOAN/HBO

his Lord Commander cape and, while struggling to return to normal strength, assents to the hanging of Thorne and other traitors before killing them himself. Dany's situation, meanwhile, continues to deteriorate; and Cersei and Jaime's vengeance plot is interrupted by the council's desire to avoid them entirely. Arya's sight is restored! Young Rickon is revealed as Ramsay's new prisoner. (Oof.) Bran is taken deeper into the past by the Three-Eyed Raven, observing the circumstances leading up to Robert's Rebellion. Varys and Tyrion continue to helm Meereen, this time with the news coming in that the Free City of Volantis has been secretly funding the Sons of the Harpy. **INTRODUCES** The High Priestess of the Dosh Khaleen. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Jon gives his robe to his Night's Watch brother Edd Tollett, thereby relinquishing his role and leaving the Rangers. **B+**

E.4 / **BOOK OF THE STRANGER**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Daniel Sackheim* **PLOT** The season kicks into gear with this standout installment. Sansa, Brienne, et al. arrive at Castle Black, where Jon is at last reunited with his Stark sister. ("We never should have left Winterfell," he tells her—yeah, maybe!) They agree it's time to take out Ramsay; at the same time, Littlefinger is mobilizing forces against him. But Ramsay still has some leverage: In a letter to Jon, he threatens to hurt Rickon if Sansa is not returned. Cersei and Jaime align more closely with their uncle, Kevan Lannister, and Lady Olenna to oust the Sparrows. And then, of course, the explosive ending: After her meeting with the khals in the temple of the Dosh Khaleen, Dany burns them all to death in one of the series' most cathartic scenes. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Dany emerging from the wreckage triumphant and unharmed, with the Dothraki kneeling in her presence. **A–**

E.5 / **THE DOOR**
WRITER *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Jack Bender* **PLOT** The One Where Hodor Dies. Need we say more? Okay, fine: Before leaving Castle Black, Jon and Sansa visit Littlefinger and offer support; Sansa also forces Littlefinger to confront the reality of her trauma. Arya vies to prove her loyalty in Braavos by killing an actress—but, in turn, must watch a theatrical reenactment of season 1's events, namely the death of her father. Red Priestess Kinvara meets with Varys and reminds him of his trauma (a lot of that this episode) while pledging assistance to a newly empowered Dany. And crucially, we learn the origin story of the White Walkers: that they were created by the Children of the Forest as weapons. How fitting that the episode ends with the Walkers surrounding the cave along with the Night King—livened by one of Bran's visions—and executing a massacre; killing the Three-Eyed Raven, a few Children, and beloved Hodor. But not before we get a glimpse into Hodor's past and how he became who he is. **INTRODUCES** The Braavosi theater troupe, helmed by Izembaro and Lady Crane. **HISTORIC MOMENT** "Hodor." **A–**

E.6 / **BLOOD OF MY BLOOD**
WRITER *Bryan Cogman* **DIRECTOR** *Jack Bender* **PLOT** Arya watches the second half of the troupe's great, meta performance of all things *Thrones*; including a caricatured version of Tyrion killing his father. Arya ends up saving Lady Crane's life and leaving with Needle—indicating she's forsaken the Faceless Men. Sam plays the role of good son before escaping with Gilly, baby Sam, and the Valyrian steel sword that hung on the wall. Dany gives a speech ensuring Dothraki loyalty. Bran is stuck deep in visions and on the verge of catastrophe before being saved by a mysterious "rider"; he and Meera learn it's his uncle Benjen Stark(!), who hasn't appeared since season 1's third episode. And Jaime tries to save Margaery, who's been in a prison cell all season but is stunned to see she's united with the High Sparrow and Tommen—a sign of aligning between the crown and faith. **INTRODUCES** Sam's brutal father, Randyll, and brother, Dickon, who both return for larger season 7 arcs. **B+**

E.7 / **THE BROKEN MAN**
WRITER *Bryan Cogman* **DIRECTOR** *Mark Mylod* **PLOT** The Hound is... alive? That's right: After Arya seemingly left him for dead, the man of few words is revealed to have survived. (A season of back-from-the-deads, this is.) Much of the episode also moves Jon, Sansa, and Davos back to the fore, and their story line is largely intercut with the Hound's return to action. Jon and Sansa contemplate assembling their army, making a deal with never-to-be-trusted Littlefinger, and keeping the Wildlings on their side; the Hound, meanwhile, gives up a potential life of peace for a chance at revenge. Elsewhere, the High Sparrow makes a veiled threat against Lady Olenna, after which Margaery persuades her grandmother to return to Highgarden. **INTRODUCES** Young Lyanna Mormont, cousin of Jorah and resident *GoT* meme queen. Also Lord Robett Glover, key to Jon Snow's path to becoming King in the North. **HISTORIC MOMENT** The Hound ominously, commandingly picks up an ax to close out his story line this episode. **B+**

E.8 / **NO ONE**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Mark Mylod* **PLOT** A fairly dull episode that sets up the best one-two punch in *GoT* history. The episode's title obviously refers to Arya, who formally rejects the Faceless Men and prepares to return to Westeros. (She also rejects the acting troupe, which could have made a great spin-off.) Jaime, while helping the Freys take Riverrun back from the Tullys, reveals to Edmure Tully—surprise!—that he really only cares about Cersei and will do anything to get back to her. Ultimately, Jaime agrees to give Edmure safe passage to the north if he allows the Lannisters and Freys to peacefully occupy the castle and hang their banners over its walls, which he does. Cersei places a bounty on Sansa's head. The Hound is back to killing and is pitched to join the Brotherhood Without Banners. Tyrion spots ships headed into

Hodor Illustration by **SACHIN TENG**

Meereen, with Missandei noting the slavers have come to reclaim their property. Dany is back with Drogon. **C+**

E.9 / **BATTLE OF THE BASTARDS**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Miguel Sapochnik* **PLOT** The season comes into much tighter focus, with "Battle" splitting its time between Meereen and the fight for Winterfell. Jon and Ramsay face off in an anticipated confrontation that lives up to the hype; just when it seems the battle against the encroaching Masters' fleet. In a thrilling reunion, Dany rides Drogon and—assisted by Rhaegal and Viserion—burns the fleet, sparing only one master. Ramsay is beaten and taken prisoner by Jon, where he meets his fate—to fans' deep satisfaction. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Sansa watching her abuser, Ramsay, eaten alive by his starving hounds. **A–**

E.10 / **THE WINDS OF WINTER**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Miguel Sapochnik* **PLOT** Cersei's great revenge. Everyone in King's Landing gathers for her demise at her and Loras' trial at the Sept of Baelor in this spectacular season finale. But Cersei remains in her keep a little too long; her cousin Lancel is sent to retrieve her. Her great plan unfolds: Lancel finds a wildfire cache on the verge of exploding and is stabbed before he's able to put it out. Margaery is the first to realize something's wrong—that a trap has been set—but she's too late. The High Sparrow doesn't let anyone leave. The wildfire is ignited, and the Sept (and everyone inside) is annihilated. Jaime reunites with Cersei, who—utterly gleeful over her perfectly executed scheme and unaware that it prompted Tommen to commit suicide—is crowned Queen of the Seven Kingdoms. **HISTORIC MOMENTS** Bran learns Jon is the child of Lyanna (more to come on that...); the burning of the Sept; and the last we see of Dany in season 6: setting sail for Westeros with her army, prepared for the grand battle. **A**

SEASON 7

E.1 / **DRAGONSTONE**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Jeremy Podeswa* **PLOT** After a long journey around the known world, Dany finally arrives at her family's ancestral home of Dragonstone. Little does she know that the island is built on a massive supply of dragonglass, a fact Sam—taking a break from cleaning out bedpans and ladling out slop—discovers in the Citadel's secret archives. He's not the only one thinking about White Walkers these days. While Cersei forges an alliance with Euron and prepares for war with Dany, Jon turns his attention to the threat beyond the Wall. Even the Hound is convinced of the danger after his Brotherhood Without Banners brothers Beric and Thoros let him peek at their oracular fire. Meanwhile, the Hound's old pupil Arya achieves final revenge for the Red Wedding by wiping out every last member of the traitorous House Frey. **INTRODUCES** Ed Sheeran as a friendly Lannister soldier. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Dragons are back in Westeros. **B**

E.2 / **STORMBORN**
WRITER *Bryan Cogman* **DIRECTOR** *Mark Mylod* **PLOT** Arya continues her trek through the Riverlands and briefly reunites with her old friend Hot Pie, who tells her that Jon is King in the North. That changes Arya's direction from south to north. Dany is also informed of Jon's recent ascension; after learning that he has Tyrion's seal of approval, she invites him to Dragonstone to bend the knee. Meanwhile, her military alliance fails its first test

Olenna Tyrell Illustration by **HSIAO RON CHENG**

when Euron's Iron Fleet attacks the Martells. The Sand Snakes are no match for Euron's savagery, and Theon jumps in the water rather than try to save Yara. **(RE)INTRODUCES** Nymeria, Arya's long-lost direwolf, is revealed to be alive and well—and in command of a veritable dog army. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Most maesters are content to simply treat greyscale, but Sam has always been a careful reader. By paying close attention to an old book, he successfully cures Jorah of the disease—a nigh-impossible task that impresses even Archmaester Ebrose. **B–**

E.3 / **THE QUEEN'S JUSTICE**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Mark Mylod* **PLOT** Rather than bow before Dany's coalition, Cersei tries breaking it apart one piece at a time. When Euron brings Ellaria before her in chains, Cersei consigns her daughter's murderer to an almost unspeakable fate. Then, while Tyrion sends the Unsullied to assault the Lannisters' ancestral home of Casterly Rock, Cersei orders Jaime and his forces—including Dickon and Randyll Tarly—to take Highgarden, which settles her debt with the Iron Bank. House Tyrell comes to an end when Jaime delivers poison to Lady Olenna. But before dying, the Queen of Thorns finally confesses that she ordered the assassination of Joffrey. **INTRODUCES** Casterly Rock, never before seen on page or screen. **HISTORIC MOMENTS** In Melisandre's words, ice and fire have finally united with Jon arriving at Dragonstone. Lady Olenna's savage final line: "Tell Cersei. I want her to know it was me." **B+**

E.4 / **THE SPOILS OF WAR**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Matt Shakman* **PLOT** Dany is tired of losing. After learning of Highgarden's fall, she leaves Dragonstone to settle the score herself. Riding Drogon, she leads her Dothraki army in a battle to wipe out Jaime's forces. It's hard enough for the Lannister soldiers to contend with the vicious Dothraki, much less a fire-breathing dragon. But Bronn utilizes a modified ballista, and manages to land a bolt in Drogon's side. As a grounded Dany works to remove the projectile, Jaime seizes his chance to run her down. Only a last-minute intervention from Bronn saves Jaime from Drogon's fire. **INTRODUCES** The dragons' vulnerability. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Arya returns home to Winterfell. As usual, no one mistakes the skilled fighter for a lady. But despite time apart, the siblings still recognize each other—even the greatly changed Bran. **A**

E.5 / **EASTWATCH**
WRITER *Dave Hill* **DIRECTOR** *Matt Shakman* **PLOT** Dany sentences Dickon and Randyll to death by Drogon's fire for refusing to kneel following her victory; Tyrion fears she might have inherited some of her ancestors' bloodlust. Bran has a vision of the Night King's army marching and sends ravens to every corner of Westeros with warnings. Not even the Citadel believes him, which inspires Sam to leave so he can help where he's really needed. With everyone reluctant to believe in White Walkers, the Brotherhood Without Banners join Jon on an expedition beyond the Wall to capture a wight as undeniable proof. **INTRODUCES** Gendry's fancy war hammer. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Jon meets his first dragon. Thanks to his secret Targaryen blood, he becomes one of the first people other than Dany to touch Drogon and live to tell the tale. **B–**

E.6 / **BEYOND THE WALL**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Alan Taylor* **PLOT** While on their wight-finding mission, Thoros meets his end at the hands of a reanimated bear, which means there will be no more Red God resurrections for Beric. The group successfully captures a wight, but find themselves encircled by the Night King's army. Luckily, Gendry is able to run back to Eastwatch and send a raven to Dany, who arrives with her dragons. In return for her help, Jon pledges fealty to her. On the other side of the Wall, Littlefinger attempts to pit Sansa and Arya against each other. **INTRODUCES** Jon's loyalty oath to Dany. **HISTORIC MOMENT** Dany finally loses one of her dragons. But the Night King doesn't just kill Viserion; he resurrects him as a wight, giving the Army of the Dead an incredible weapons upgrade. **C–**

E.7 / **THE DRAGON AND THE WOLF**
WRITERS *David Benioff & D.B. Weiss* **DIRECTOR** *Jeremy Podeswa* **PLOT** Almost every major player in Westeros unites in King's Landing to discuss the Night King. Not even Cersei can deny the threat, yet she refuses to cease hostilities after Jon admits his allegiance to Dany. But Cersei is expecting (or at least wants people to *think* she is); Tyrion plays on her pregnancy to get her to join the alliance, though she secretly still plans betrayal. That's one scheme too many for Jaime, who finally leaves his sister behind just as winter begins. Winter comes for Littlefinger when the Stark kids unite to unveil his lies. Arya kills him with a dagger—the same one used to attack Bran in season 1, which Littlefinger had falsely claimed belonged to Tyrion. **INTRODUCES** The Hound's awareness that his brother, the Mountain, is still alive (well, reanimated by Cersei's Hand of the Queen, Qyburn). **HISTORIC MOMENT** The Wall falls. Riding the undead dragon, the Night King destroys the magical barrier, and the dead pour into Westeros. **B+**

Reporting by Chancellor Agard, Kerensa Cadenas, David Canfield, Christian Holub, Ruth Kinane, Derek Lawrence, Sarah Rodman, and Nick Romano

ESSENTIAL EPISODES
"Winter Is Coming" (*Season 1*) • "Baelor" (*Season 1*) • "Blackwater" (*Season 2*) • "The Rains of Castamere" (*Season 3*) • "The Lion and the Rose" (*Season 4*) • "The Children" (*Season 4*) • "Mother's Mercy" (*Season 5*) • "Battle of the Bastards" (*Season 6*) • "The Winds of Winter" (*Season 6*) • "The Dragon and the Wolf" (*Season 7*)

AND NOW YOUR WATCH HAS ENDED

MOST Memorable CAMEOS

WILL CHAMPION
The Coldplay drummer was one of the musicians playing "The Rains of Castamere" during the infamous Red Wedding in season 3.

SIGUR RÓS
In season 4's "The Lion and the Rose," doomed groom Joffrey thanked the Icelandic musicians (who appeared as the wedding band) by throwing coins at them.

MASTODON
Grammy winners Brann Dailor, Brent Hinds, and Bill Kelliher were among the Wildlings resurrected as wights in season 5.

ED SHEERAN
The most high-profile (and controversial) cameo; the singer-songwriter appeared in season 7 as a singing Lannister soldier to surprise Maisie Williams.

NOAH SYNDERGAARD
The New York Mets' star pitcher fit right in as a towering Lannister soldier in season 7.

DAVID BENIOFF AND D.B.WEISS
The *Game of Thrones* creators' visages appeared among the many mugs in the Faceless Men's"Hall of Faces."

Ed Sheeran

GAME OF THRONES: HELEN SLOAN/HBO

All IN THE

Mixing up the Tullys and the Tyrells?

Brynden Tully ("The Blackfish")
Killed in the siege of Riverrun

Hoster Tully
Died naturally

Minisa Tully
Died after giving birth

Walder Frey
Killed by Arya

Lysa Arryn
Pushed through the Moon Door by Littlefinger

Jon Arryn
Poisoned by Lysa and Littlefinger

Edmure Tully
Retook Riverrun for the Lannisters as their prisoner

Roslin Tully
Raising her son

Petyr Baelish ("Littlefinger")
Executed by Arya

Robyn Arryn
Continuing to be bad at archery

Catelyn Stark
Killed during the Red Wedding

Ned Stark
Beheaded on orders from King Joffrey

Benjen Stark
Killed by wights while saving Jon Snow

Brandon Stark
Killed by Aerys II Targaryen

Lyanna Stark
Died after giving birth to Jon

Rhaella Targaryen
Died after giving birth to Daenerys

Talisa Stark
Killed during the Red Wedding

Robb Stark
Killed during the Red Wedding

Bran Stark
Seeing all as the new Three-Eyed Raven

Rickon Stark
Killed in the Battle of the Bastards

Jon Snow
Preparing to fight the Night King

Doran Martell
Killed by Ellaria Sand

Elia Martell
Killed by the Mountain during Robert's war

Rhaegar Targaryen
Killed in battle by Robert Baratheon

Balon Greyjoy
Thrown from a bridge by his brother Euron

Euron Greyjoy
Sailing to Essos to hire the Golden Company

Arya Stark
Training in Winterfell

Sansa Stark
Running Winterfell in Jon Snow's absence

Trystane Martell
Killed by Obara Sand

Oberyn Martell
Killed by the Mountain

Rhaenys Targaryen
Killed by the Mountain during Robert's war

Aegon Targaryen
Killed by the Mountain during Robert's war

Yara Greyjoy
Biding her time in captivity

Theon Greyjoy
Plotting to rescue Yara

Walda Frey
Killed by Ramsay Bolton's dogs

Roose Bolton
Killed by Ramsay Bolton

Ramsay Bolton
Killed by his dogs after losing Winterfell

Tyene Sand
Poisoned by Cersei

Ellaria Sand
Rotting away in the Black Cells

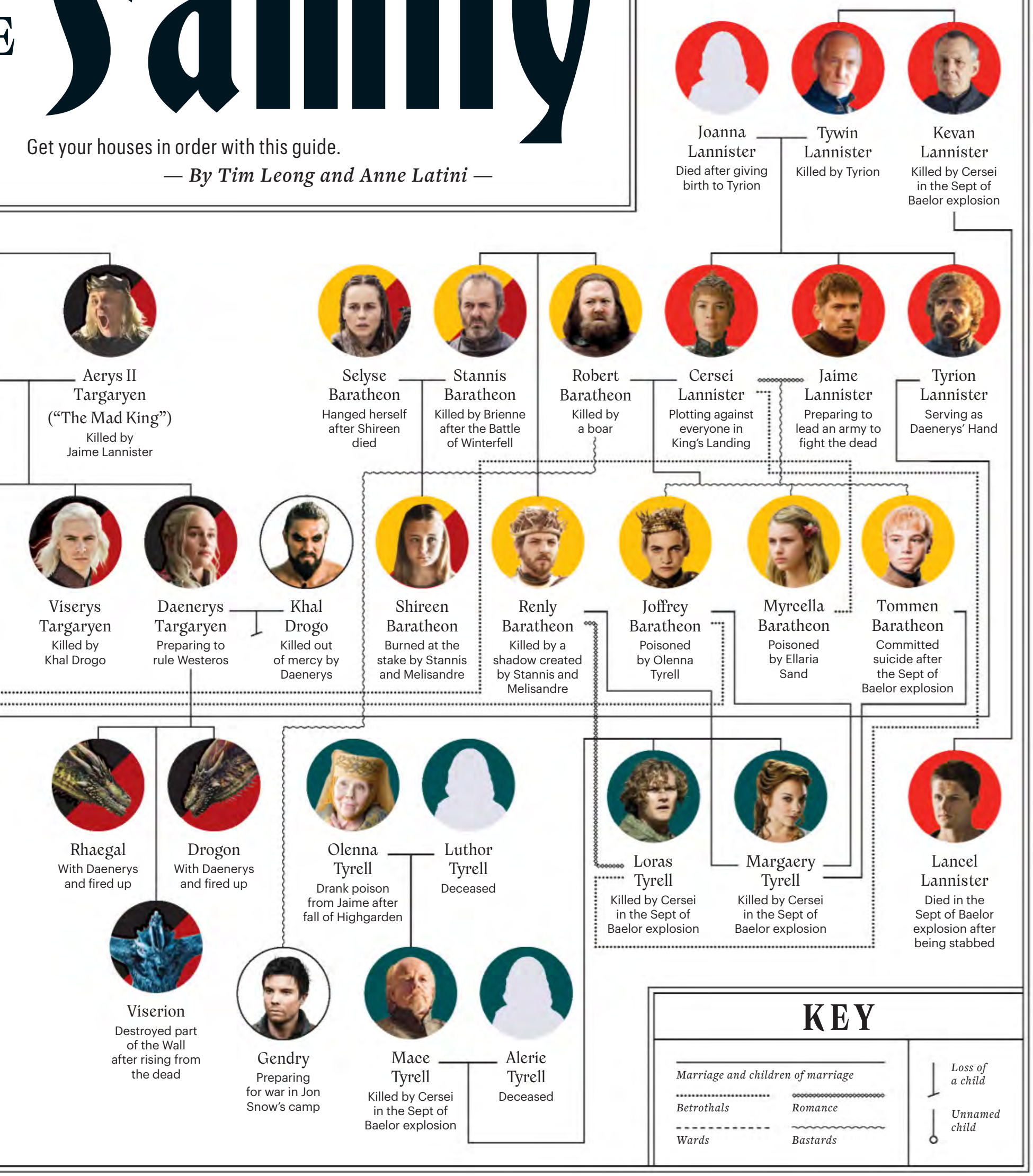
Obara Sand
Killed by Euron Greyjoy

Nymeria Sand
Killed by Euron Greyjoy

E Family

Get your houses in order with this guide.

— By Tim Leong and Anne Latini —



BENJEN STARK, VISERYS TARGARYEN, RHAEGAL, DROGON, VISERION, CERSEI LANNISTER: HBO (6); ROBB STARK, ROBERT BARATHEON: NICK BRIGGS/HBO (2); THEON GREYJOY, DORAN MARTELL, TRYSTANE MARTELL, ELLARIA SAND, OLENNA TYRELL, LORAS TYRELL, MYRCELLA BARATHEON, JAIME LANNISTER, TYRION LANNISTER, TYWIN LANNISTER: MACALL B. POLAY/HBO (10); ALL OTHERS: HELEN SLOAN/HBO (42)

Reason #137 to Go to the Gym

Why HBO greenlit Game of Thrones. • **BY JAMES HIBBERD**

A random encounter persuaded HBO to turn George R.R. Martin's novels into a TV show.

It was 2008, and the pitch for *Game of Thrones* seemed like a huge risk at the time: An adult fantasy show had never succeeded, the project would be expensive, HBO's brand was built on more "serious" programming, and the writers proposing the adaptation—David Benioff and Dan Weiss—had never run a TV series.

"We had this pilot script, and we were budgeting it and scratching our heads [over] whether we should greenlight this," HBO's then programming president, Michael Lombardo, recalls. With the decision hanging over him, Lombardo escaped his Santa Monica office and hit the gym.

As it turned out, Benioff and Weiss go to that same gym.

"I see Dan on one of the bicycles," Lombardo says. "He was reading this dog-eared copy of the first book. And it had underscores and yellow highlights [on the pages]. And he did not know I saw him. I thought, 'We're going to figure this out. These guys breathe this show in a way that doesn't happen all the time.' I found that window into Dan in that quiet moment, that this is what he was doing in his free time. It made me determined to figure this thing out."

The lesson: If you want to pull off a massive creative accomplishment, it takes hard work and passion—and going to the same gym as HBO's president doesn't hurt.

MAP TO THE Starks

Inside the making of the *Game of Thrones* title sequence.
— By David Canfield —

IN MINIATURE AND AT WARP SPEED, THE HISTORY of *Game of Thrones*—the bloody battles, the shifts in power, the rise and fall of houses—is depicted in the series' title sequence and its three-dimensional map of the Seven Kingdoms.

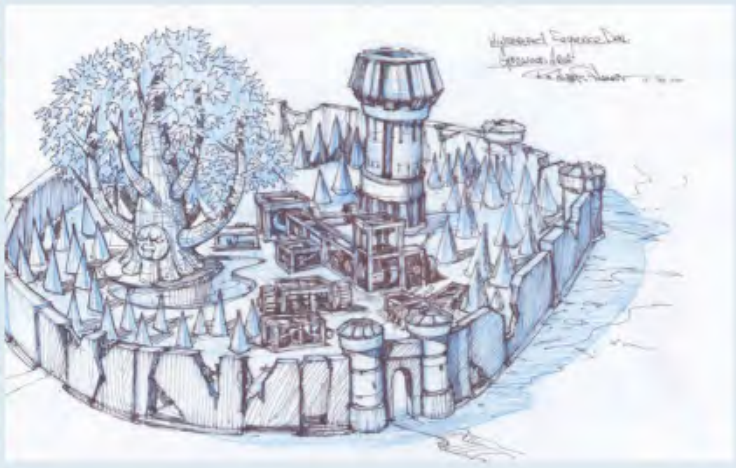
The map was first developed for the pilot, but with the intention of using it for interstitials, which would keep the audience clear on where the action was taking place. "It broke up the narrative in the most horrible way," title designer Angus Wall says. "But we realized there was a need to tell the geography of the world—in the same way that a legend would for a book. That became the title sequence." The next dilemma was how to showcase it in its entirety; the choice to situate the map within a sphere came down to pragmatics. "We don't have to worry about what's outside of the world because we're always going to be inside the world," Wall explains. "It's much easier to orient yourself spatially if you can see

TITLE SEQUENCE: HBO/ELASTIC

TOP *GoT* NICKNAMES • Mother of Dragons (Daenerys Targaryen), The Spider (Varys), The Hound (Sandor Clegane), The White Wolf (Jon Snow), Kingslayer

Illustration by **LÆMEUR**

(*From left*) The mechanics of Westeros in action; concept art for the title sequence



where you're going." Or, put more concisely: "It's boring to have flat worlds."

Yet *Game of Thrones*' epic titles are part of the series' evolution. Wall says he wanted to make the map interactive—"like the game of Risk." (How very appropriate.) Thus changes were implemented in step with the series—most notably, the burning of Winterfell, represented by smoky rubble. Many fans cheered, meanwhile, when the Starks' direwolf sigil was revived in the titles for the season 6 finale, a triumphant marking of Ramsay Bolton's defeat. "Our work is always based on conversations we have with the show creators before the beginning of every season," Wall says. "We start months and months before the season is going to launch."

As the show went on, the map expanded, making the design team's job more difficult. "The biggest debate is always what detail to leave in and what detail to leave out," Wall says. "Would we have loved to show the movement of every army? Yes. But it's an incredible amount of work just to create different locations and different versions of each location." Winterfell and King's Landing were pared down to their largest structures; some more minor locations were left out. But as the action has coalesced—building toward the final season's great climax—the designs have become more intricate. Wall thinks viewers don't even notice. (Okay, but have you met these fans?) "The technology that we've used to create this has changed so radically over the course of all these seasons, so there are constant little technical upgrades that happen every season.... The definition has improved so much," he reveals. As to what this means for season 8, Wall's lips are sealed: "I can't wait for people to see it."

CONCEPT ART: HBO/ELASTIC; DJAWADI: J. KEMPIN/GETTY IMAGES

SOUNDS OF
Fire and Ice

Composer Ramin Djawadi reveals stories behind the show's most iconic musical moments. • **BY CHANCELLOR AGARD**

When Ramin Djawadi signed on to score *Game of Thrones*, showrunners David Benioff and Dan Weiss gave him one rule: No flutes allowed. "They didn't want a medieval feel because that's what you'd expect," says Djawadi (*Person of Interest*, *Iron Man*). "They wanted something a bit more contemporary." In the end that boundary was a blessing: "Giving me restrictions of where to search creatively helped so much."

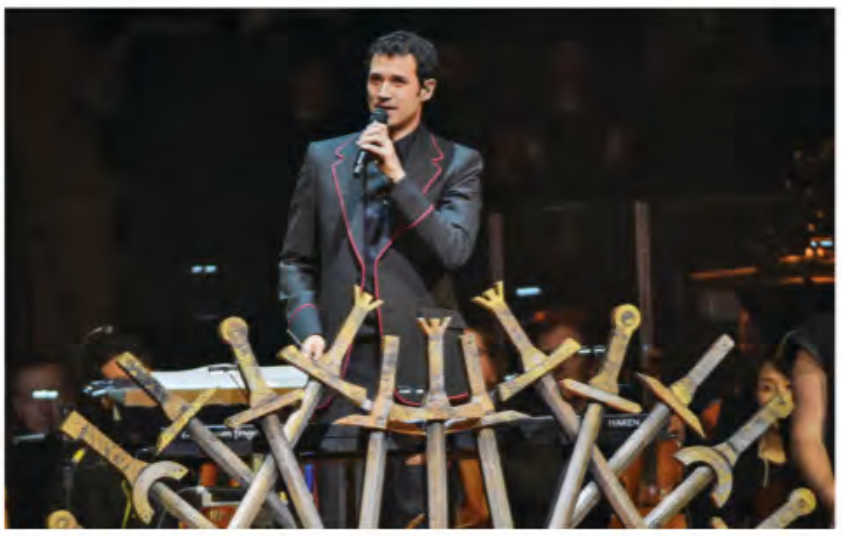
With flutes off the table, the Iranian-German musician, 44, decided to make the cello the backbone of this epic. "It has such a wide range," he says of the instrument, which provides the main melody in the opening sequence. Djawadi remembers Benioff and Weiss sending him the first YouTube cover of the theme the morning after the series premiere. "It was a rock version, with a guy playing all the instruments himself," Djawadi says. "It was very inspiring and humbling to see that it inspired other people."

Over the seasons, Djawadi has expanded *Thrones*' musical palette to include non-Western instruments. For instance, the hammer dulcimer, which is usually heard in music from Asia and the Middle East, is often used in association with Arya Stark because the instrument's pingy sound reminds Djawadi of her sword Needle.

One of Djawadi's boldest moves was the use of a piano in "Light of the Seven"—which scores Cersei Lannister's explosive plot to destroy her enemies in the season 6 finale—because piano had never been part of the show's musical language. He was so concerned the instrument was too radical that at first he tried the music out on different instruments, like the harp. "It just didn't have that same effect," he says. "So we went back to the piano. The minute it starts, you realize right away that something is not right."

Djawadi is currently at work on the final season's score, a rewarding task: "It's great to see it come to an end, and, musically, for me to give closure to all of the material that we've carried through the seasons."

Ramin Djawadi at a *Game of Thrones* concert at Madison Square Garden in 2017



(Jaime Lannister), Queen of Thorns (Olenna Tyrell), The Mountain (Gregor Clegane), The Red Viper (Oberyn Martell), The Blackfish (Brynden Tully)

Dressed to Kill

Cersei Lannister
(SEASON 3)

Funnel dresses are the *GoT* version of the power suit: It's what the ladies don when they want to make their presence felt. "At this time in Cersei's (Lena Headey) story arc, she was feeling threatened by Margaery, and she started to try and emphasize her Lannister power," says Clapton. Hence, the heavy red fabric, armored accents, and statement necklace. All of it was vetted by Headey. "She has great taste and an innate understanding of her character's journey."

Margaery Tyrell
(SEASON 4)

Who knew a wedding dress could be so sinister? "The rose is Margaery's family sigil, and I wanted a briar rose that [seemed] to climb the dress and crown, where it symbolically would start to strangle its Baratheon host," says Clapton. The roses were hand-rolled, and though the bias-cut gown seems soft and simple, it, much like Margaery (Natalie Dormer), was tougher than it looked. "It was supported by a structure to hold the dress and the weight of the roses."

Ellaria Sand
(SEASON 4)

Someone didn't get the memo about proper wedding attire. The skin-baring outfit Ellaria (Indira Varma) wore to Margaery and Joffrey's union "was designed to exude power, pride, and awareness of her sexuality," says Clapton, who was inspired by Indian paintings and illustrations from the *Kama Sutra* for the look. As for the headdress, Clapton's team created the slinky chain ornament to be "a beautiful piece of jewelry to visually set her apart."

Game of Thrones may have the air of a period piece, but the fashion—structured volume, strategic cutouts, and texture, texture, texture (hi, Jon Snow!)—is as forward as it gets. We talked to longtime costume designer Michele Clapton and got the inside scoop on the show's most memorable looks.

◆ *By Clarissa Cruz*

Cersei Lannister

(***SEASON 6***)

This is a dramatic example of a character's clothing telegraphing her emotional state. "I wanted her to wear black as a sign of her deep mourning for her children and father," says Clapton. "The style of her dresses are [like] armor. She is untouchable—she no longer has to use her sexuality to procure what she wants." It's a far cry from Cersei's softer looks earlier in the series. "She has to some extent become androgynous. She finally has what she always wanted, but was it worth it?"

SKETCHES: MICHELE CLAPTON (4); *GAME OF THRONES*: HELEN SLOAN/HBO (3)

Jon Snow (Kit Harington) makes fur fly

The Finer Details

Jon Snow's Cloak

(***SEASON 5***)

So many untold stories under Jonny's cloak! "The press got it wrong when they said it was made out of an IKEA rug—that was Samwell [Tarly]'s," says Clapton. Also, Snow's piece was so heavy, the costume team carried it up the hills. Finally, there was some serious technology hidden underneath. "We found these amazing vests that actors would wear under their costumes," says Clapton. "We could pump [in] hot water in winter and icy cold water in summer to make them more comfortable."

Daenerys' Meereen Dress

(***SEASON 4***)

Turns out, less material doesn't mean less work. "This was one of the most difficult dresses to make," says Clapton of the dress that made it clear to Jorah (Iain Glen) that Daenerys (Emilia Clarke) had just slept with Daario (Michiel Huisman). "It had to look effortless, yet the structure to do this with so little coverage has to be so precisely cut. It also had to give Emilia the support and confidence to wear it."

Sansa's Wedding Dress

(***SEASON 5***)

Consider Sansa's (Sophie Turner) wedding ensemble a dress-as-family-crest. "The fastening clasps were in memory of her mother, the fur capelet was a nod to her father and brothers, and the texture was reminiscent of the simple cloths used by the people of Winterfell," says Clapton. It also pulled double duty in an unintended way. "To the horror of the set dressers, her dress acted as a large broom and completely cleared the path of the carefully laid fresh fake snow. They had to reset the path each take."

Ten-Year Challenge: (*Clockwise from top*) Sophie Turner, Maisie Williams, Alfie Allen, Richard Madden, and Kit Harington; Madden and George R.R. Martin; Harington

When They Were Pups

Revisiting one of the cast's earliest appearances.

— By Ruth Kinane —

SEERS CAN BE A VITAL ASSET TO WESTEROSI vying for the Iron Throne, but in real life the *Game of Thrones* stars had a fortune-teller of their own: Ice and Fire superfan Adam Whitehead. At a 2009 George R.R. Martin book signing in Belfast, the sci-fi and fantasy blogger met some of the cast (who were filming the pilot nearby) and quickly realized he knew much more about their characters' futures than they did. He fondly recalls informing a 12-year-old Maisie Williams that Arya was going to become an assassin. "She was quite taken aback," says Whitehead. "Richard Madden [Robb Stark] was in command, talking to everyone and making sure he learned their names, just like the King in the North," he says. Whitehead guesses there were about 500 people in attendance at the signing, just a glimpse of what was in store when winter came via HBO in 2011. "I think that was the first time they realized it wasn't going to get canceled after five episodes," says Whitehead.

Steel,

THE SPOTLIGHT

This Westerosi winter's essential seasonal accessories are White Walker-slaying Valyrian steel blades. • **BY EVAN LEWIS**

Longclaw

When Jon saved Jeor Mormont from a wight in season 1, the Lord Commander gave the blade to his steward, replacing the ancestral Bear Island pommel with a Winterfell direwolf.

The Dagger

The mysterious dagger poured fuel on the Stark/Lannister feud when it was used in an attempt on Bran's life. Closely associated with Petyr Baelish, it eventually wound up in the hands of Arya Stark, who used it to kill scheming Littlefinger.

Oathkeeper

This is one of two swords forged from the Stark family's blade, Ice, after Ned Stark's execution. Tywin Lannister gave the sword to Jaime, and Jaime then passed it to Brienne of Tarth.

Widow's Wail

Oathkeeper's sibling sword, originally owned and gaudily named by King Joffrey, has been taken up by Jaime since his son's death.

Heartsbane

Until recently, the sword of House Tarly was a Horn Hill hearth decoration. After his latest falling-out with his father, Sam took the sword, and it is now with him at Winterfell.

Jon Snow has nerves of Valyrian steel

BOOK SIGNING: ADAM WHITEHEAD (3); *GAME OF THRONES*: HELEN SLOAN/HBO

RECENT RULERS OF THE SEVEN KINGDOMS • Cersei Lannister, Tommen Baratheon, Joffrey Baratheon, Robert Baratheon, Aerys II Targaryen (The Mad

Daenerys With the Good Hair

Queer Eye *groomer Jonathan Van Ness and star of Funny or Die's hilarious* Gay of Thrones *recaps weighs in on which locks are worthy of the Iron Throne, and which need some TLC.*

BY PIYA SINHA-ROY

Sansa Stark

Sansa's given us ginger realness, she's given us a more brunette realness; I'm sure she's going to go back to ginger. I love her character. I need the whole Stark family to get some wins. I need to see her have a win. I can't take anymore Stark trauma. She has been through it—she's still Sansa, but she's a bit hardened, she doesn't have time to take no s---. So I feel like her hair is a bit edgier and more center-parted, more braids and more styling on the hair that makes it feel more like Cersei à la seasons 1 and 2. I feel like she's really developing her power with her hair transformation.

Daenerys Targaryen

Talk about iconic—that is very iconic hair. For colorists out there, though, that is one of the hairstyles that has caused the most corrective color and hair crackage of all time—it's very unattainable hair. At first, that was her hair with extensions; then I feel like it was a full wig, and then for the last season they colored Emilia's hair. Her hair's really short now; if I was reading into that, I wonder if [Daenerys] experiences a haircut, which we know in Dothraki culture means you got beat. I'm hoping that's not a thing and that she's serving us a lot of extensions this season.

Cersei Lannister

At first, I was not Team Cers; even now, I'm not sure if I am Team Cers. She's almost giving me the Donald Trump treatment; she's so corrupt and so messed up—but she's not even calling it fake news. She's like, "Yes, I am psycho, and I will kill you whilst falling in love with my fraternal twin brother." And I think it's refreshing to see someone so 100 percent authentic about their craziness. And with her hair, she can do no wrong—she can do extremely short, she can do medium-length pixie. What can Cersei not do except fall in love with someone she's blood-related to? My feelings for Cersei's hair journey can best be described by the following No. 1 hit single by Miss Britney Spears, "Stronger." Her loneliness ain't killing her no more.

Brienne of Tarth

Obsessed, so much. She moves from strength to strength. She's the Simone Biles of Winterfell. Everything she does is perfect, seamless. She's a really good example of sometimes people don't like a short haircut, but it's all pushed back from their face, but then if you blow it forward and give them a little fringe like Robin Wright, they love it. Brienne, she's so versatile—sometimes it's strong and masculine, and she's like, "Don't come for me unless you want to leave with a sword between your temples." But other times, like her scenes with Jaime Lannister, her hair is very soft, very feminine. It's a great example of how short hair can be very versatile, very feminine and masculine.

Khal Drogo

Gorj. Pony power. Love that "long hair, don't care." Very gorgeous. The Dothraki warriors are such an important part of the story, and he was the most perfect Dothraki—he represented this fierce idea of masculinity and fierce idea of being undefeated. What I think is really cool about that world is that you have these really rage-filled men with guyliner, and he has a braid down to his butt and wears miniskirts, so his character, without ever saying it, speaks to the silliness of the binary that we always subscribe to. He's the ideal of masculine perfection, and he's in a skirt and a lazy gladiator shoe and snatched braids and a brow that he obviously goes to Anastasia Beverly Hills every six weeks. So I think that's great, it's fabulous. I miss him; I don't get to see his pecs anymore.

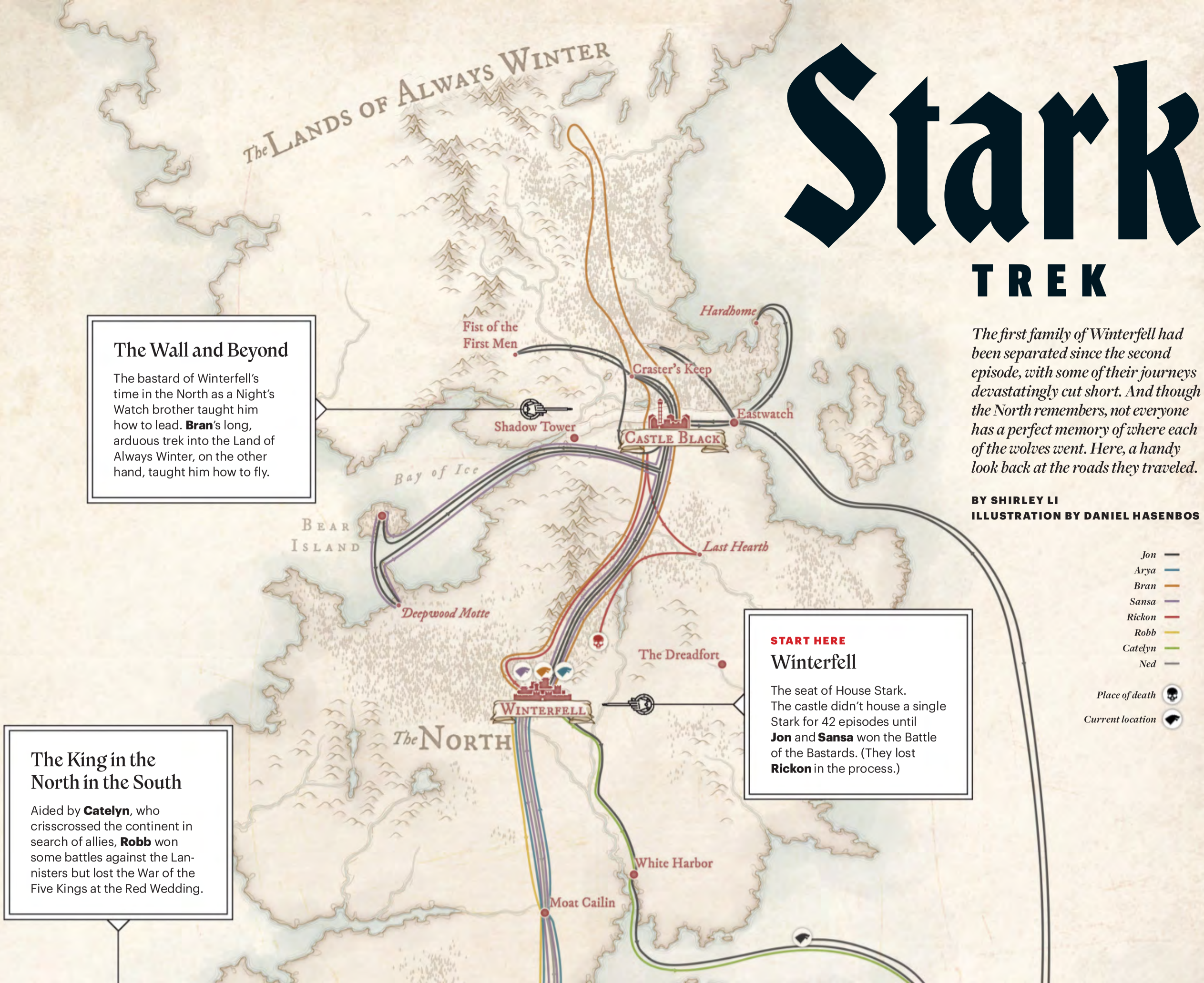
King), Aegon V Targaryen (The Unlikely), Maekar I Targaryen, Aerys I Targaryen, Daeron II Targaryen (The Good), Aegon IV Targaryen (The Unworthy)

VAN NESS: MATT MONATH; SANSA STARK, BRIENNE OF TARTH, KHAL DROGO: HELEN SLOAN/HBO (3); DAENERYS TARGARYEN: MACALL B. POLAY/HBO; CERSEI LANNISTER: HBO

Stark TREK

The first family of Winterfell had been separated since the second episode, with some of their journeys devastatingly cut short. And though the North remembers, not everyone has a perfect memory of where each of the wolves went. Here, a handy look back at the roads they traveled.

BY SHIRLEY LI
ILLUSTRATION BY DANIEL HASENBOS



The Wall and Beyond

The bastard of Winterfell's time in the North as a Night's Watch brother taught him how to lead. **Bran**'s long, arduous trek into the Land of Always Winter, on the other hand, taught him how to fly.

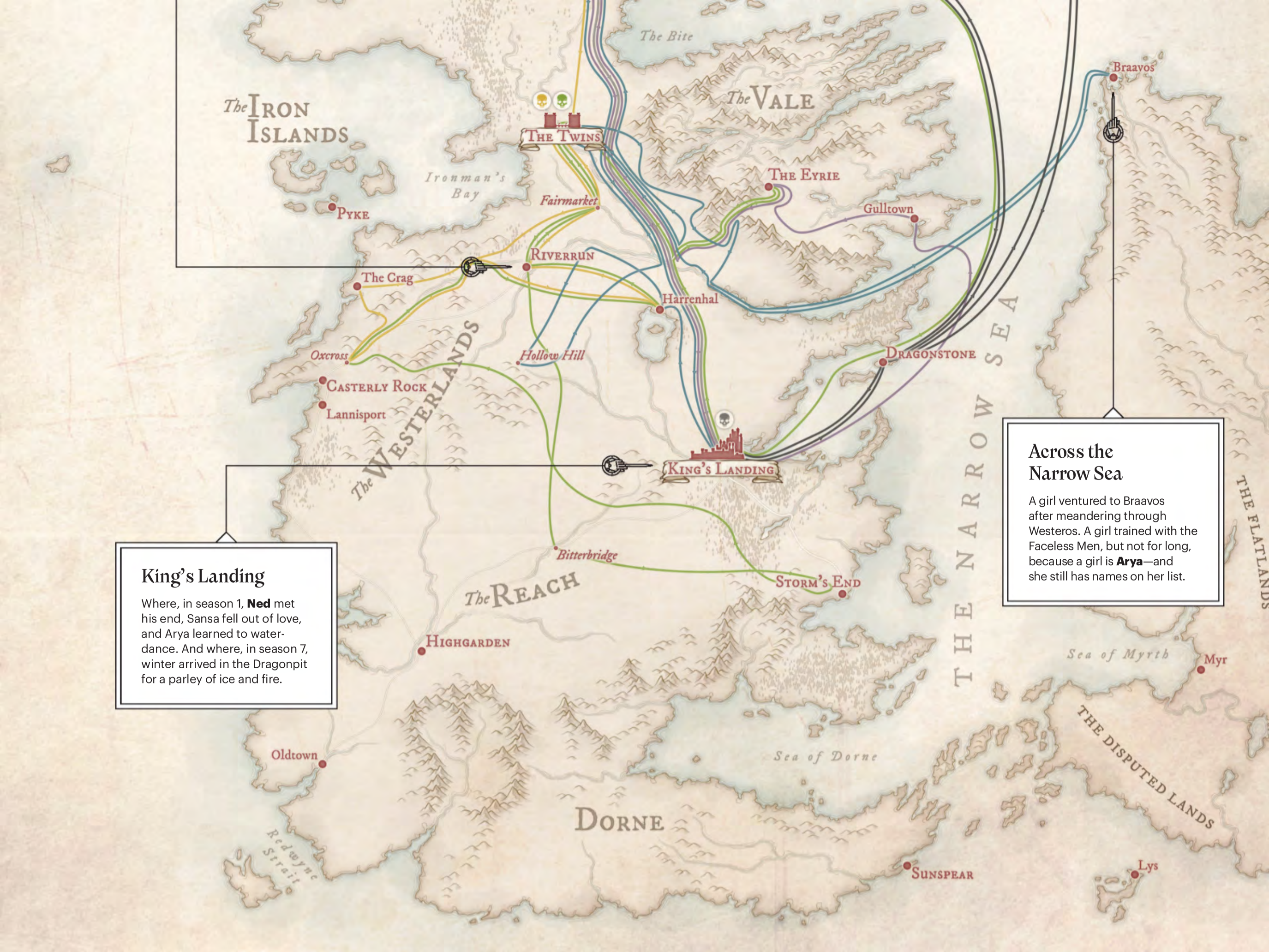
START HERE

Winterfell

The seat of House Stark. The castle didn't house a single Stark for 42 episodes until **Jon** and **Sansa** won the Battle of the Bastards. (They lost **Rickon** in the process.)

The King in the North in the South

Aided by **Catelyn**, who crisscrossed the continent in search of allies, **Robb** won some battles against the Lannisters but lost the War of the Five Kings at the Red Wedding.



King's Landing

Where, in season 1, **Ned** met his end, Sansa fell out of love, and Arya learned to water-dance. And where, in season 7, winter arrived in the Dragonpit for a parley of ice and fire.

Across the Narrow Sea

A girl ventured to Braavos after meandering through Westeros. A girl trained with the Faceless Men, but not for long, because a girl is **Arya**—and she still has names on her list.

Page TO Screen

The Death of Jon Snow

The young Lord Commander was always going to die, but his final moments were originally intended to look different. • BY CHRISTIAN HOLUB

Sometimes, storyboard artists like Will Simpson will have different opinions from directors about how an important scene should play out. Such a divergence is apparent in the storyboards for Jon Snow's death at the end of season 5. Simpson's take zoomed in on the Lord Commander's eyes, while the final screen version stepped back a bit to watch him bleed out in the snow.

"That's me thinking, 'Do we get in close?' I like getting in close on characters to show the fear on their faces, or the horror, or the shock," Simpson says. "Because he was dying, I would have wanted to go in and show the light going out of his eyes. When you get into discussions, the directors might have a different version, depending on how they wanted to leave the audience at the end. But a lot of it is very close to what we see on screen."

The tightest, and most gut-wrenching, shot sketched is when Olly stabs Jon

Will Simpson says: "This could be a slo-mo shot where the Watch all back off"

EVERY SEASON THEY GO THE EXTRA MILE

They're among the first to arrive on set and among the last to leave, keeping all the show's secrets while earning roughly $100 a day

Even if you read every story ever written about *Game of Thrones*, you won't find an interview with any of the show's hundreds of extras. They're not allowed to speak to the media and don't. Yet *GoT* background actors work incredibly hard on the series, and many have been with the production for years, playing various soldiers, tradesmen, and Westeros residents. Some even have tattoos commemorating their roles.

"Obviously they're called extras, so there's not a whole lot of money or respect that comes with that job," showrunner David Benioff says. "They work so hard, with these insane hours. You think back on how many of our scenes where the extras play such a major part. Many of these guys kept long hair and beards purely for the show, and they even came up with character names and backstories for themselves, their childhood traumas, what House they owed allegiance to.... It really adds to the believability of so many shots that these dudes really take this seriously."
—*James Hibberd*

STORYBOARDS: WILL SIMPSON/HBO (2)

Burning Questions

EW investigates the lingering misunderstandings, misconceptions, and mysteries you might have heading into the final season. ◆ *By Christian Holub*

What are Bran's abilities? Bran possesses the ability of "greensight," which initially manifested in the form of strange prophetic dreams—in one of them Bran first encountered the Three-Eyed Raven in his symbolic bird form. Once he found the Three-Eyed Raven, Bran learned how to project his consciousness backward in time to witness any event in the history of Westeros. Bran also possesses the related abilities of a "warg," which allow him to take over the bodies of animals, like his direwolf Summer, or of dim-witted humans like Hodor. But questions persist about the extent of these abilities. Why could the Night King touch him on one of his sightseeing trips? Most importantly, could he take control of a dragon...?

At this point, who's the rightful heir to the Throne? If Cersei Lannister still holds the Iron Throne when she gives birth, her child will become the heir apparent. Everyone not allied with her sees Daenerys as the rightful heir to the throne, but they are missing some very important information.

How much time has passed in the realm of the show since the pilot? Robert Baratheon arrived in Winterfell in the year 298 A.C. (After the Conquest). Each season since is supposed to have lasted a year, which means that the Night King burned down the Wall in 304 A.C., with the last season set to begin shortly thereafter.

Do Craster's babies grow up to be White Walkers? While Craster's daughters become his wives and sex slaves, his sons are taken away and left at a strange altar for the White Walkers. It is unclear what exactly happens to them, but it's heavily implied that the Night King takes these babies and transforms them into White Walkers. Since wights are created from dead bodies touched by White Walkers, it follows that actual White Walkers may need to be created from living humans. They have a strong bond with the one who created them, because whenever a White Walker is killed, all the wights they created are destroyed as well. According to Beric Dondarrion, this means that killing the Night King will wipe out the entire undead army since "he turned them all."

What is the magic within the Wall? According to myth, after the Long Night the legendary Stark ancestor Brandon the Builder constructed the Wall with the help of giants and the Children of the Forest, who helped wove some extremely powerful magic into its foundations. Benjen Stark tells Bran and Meera that "while it stands, the dead cannot pass." In any case, now that the Wall has been destroyed, its magic is probably broken.

WHO LET THE Direwolves Out?

Despite being the sigil of House Stark, the family pets have had some dire fates. Let's check in with this not-so-successful doggy day care. ◆ **BY RUTH KINANE**

Grey Wind

Stark counterpart: Robb Stark
Last seen: Attending the worst wedding ever in season 3.

Summer

Stark counterpart: Bran Stark
Last seen: Beyond the Wall in season 6. Maybe it was fitting that the pup named for the warmest season couldn't survive ice.

Shaggydog

Stark counterpart: Rickon Stark
Last seen: The worst-named of the pack, poor Shaggydog was beheaded by the Umbers in season 6.

Lady

Stark counterpart: Sansa Stark
Last seen: On the Kingsroad in season 1. When Ayra's wolf bit Joffrey but couldn't be found for punishment, King Robert (but really the Lannisters) insisted that Sansa's pet be executed in its place.

Nymeria

Stark counterpart: Arya Stark
Last seen: In the woods in season 7. After six seasons apart, Arya was briefly reunited with her wolf on her way north.

Ghost ↑

Stark counterpart: Jon Snow
Last seen: One of only two members of the pack still living, Ghost has proved himself a livesaver. So what if he doesn't breathe fire?

BRAN STARK, CERSEI LANNISTER, DIREWOLF: HELEN SLOAN/HBO (3); WHITE WALKER: DAMIEN ELLIOTT/HBO

Catelyn Stark (Michelle Fairley) meets her end at the hand of one of Walder Frey's men

A Wedding

AND FOUR FUNERALS

Talk about bringing gifts not on the registry. The untold oral history of one of the show's bloodiest scenes.

— By James Hibberd —

WORST. WEDDING. EVER.

In the third season's ninth episode, "The Rains of Castamere," *Game of Thrones* staged its most notoriously disturbing sequence: the postnuptial slaughter—a largely faithful adaptation of a chapter in George R.R. Martin's book *A Storm of Swords*—of heroic Robb Stark (Richard Madden), along with his mother, Catelyn (Michelle Fairley), pregnant wife, Talisa (Oona Chaplin), beloved direwolf Grey Wind, and thousands of his bannermen. Here the *GoT* team looks back on filming the haunting affair.

GEORGE R.R. MARTIN (Author) I knew [I'd kill off Robb Stark] almost from the beginning. I killed Ned because everybody thinks, "He's the hero [and], sure, he's going to get into trouble, but then he'll somehow get out of it." The next predictable thing is to think his eldest son is going to rise up and avenge his father. Everybody is going to expect that. So immediately [killing Robb] became the next thing I had to do. It was the hardest scene I've ever had to write.

DAN WEISS (Showrunner) The Red Wedding was the thing we always told ourselves, "If we get to this moment that's in the books, and if we do it right, then [the show will] be in a pretty good place and the energy that [the twist] injects into this story will be enough to get us through to the end." But it was a very complex thing to shoot and get right.

MICHELLE FAIRLEY (Catelyn Stark) We were very fortunate—we had a week to shoot the whole wedding sequence, and did it

(*Opposite*) Robb Stark (Richard Madden) and Talisa (Oona Chaplin) in a quiet moment before things get bloody awful; (*below*) Catelyn Stark (Michelle Fairley) holds Walder Frey's wife, Joyeuse (Kelly Long), hostage

chronologically as well, so every day we edged closer to the slaughter.

DAVID NUTTER (Director) The most important part to me was the surprise element. Just before things start to turn, Catelyn, Robb, and his bride have a discussion about the baby that's coming. Robb's so happy with that and feeling so good about that. I wanted the tightest bond moment with our heroes before it began—to give the audience a sense of ease, that this is a happy ending. I didn't want to make the audience feel like something bad was going to happen. And then one of Walder Frey's children closes the big door...

The doors close, the band plays the Lannister-themed song "The Rains of Castamere," and Walder Frey [David Bradley] gives Robb his "wedding present"—a man stabbing Talisa in her pregnant belly as crossbow bolts mortally wound Robb...

OONA CHAPLIN (Talisa) Beat, beat, beat, beat—which surprised me. It surprised me every time, the gallons of blood coming out of my belly. It's quite a violent thing when somebody creeps up behind you and starts stabbing you. It was horrendous, very little acting required.

NUTTER There is a moment when Robb goes over to Talisa and sees her life fade away. I remember talking to Richard about love and about relationships and honesty and how much she means to him, and he was really getting into it. He's such a tremendous actor, and he was hitting a home run. I remember hearing people crying, and it was the hair and makeup people. I thought, "If we can make ourselves feel something while making it, then this will translate."

CHAPLIN I was actually crying while I was dead. The director had to come over: "Oona, you need to stop crying, dead people don't cry. You're dead, just be dead."

RICHARD MADDEN (Robb Stark) Arya being so close to getting to me really cut me up even more. With every episode, Robb's been further and further from people he loves. That's what we've all wanted—to get the family back together.

Catelyn makes a desperate last stand, holding one of Walder Frey's young wives hostage before killing her. Then one of his men cuts her throat...

FAIRLEY The woman is just grief-stricken. But she doesn't lose control. She knows she's dead—and in her mind she wants to be dead—and wants to get revenge as well. Because of the way it's filmed, you felt incredibly static, which is just powerful—she stays rooted to her spot. Her grief has to be expressed in some shape and form, and that's vocally and through her face. She's lost all her children and her husband, so what else does she have to live for? Her whole life has been about honor and doing the right thing. She's constantly questioning her motives and actions. This is one where she doesn't: "I'm not questioning this, I'm just doing it." Then she's standing there after like there's nothing left for her.

MADDEN It had been an exhausting five-day shoot. We were mentally exhausted. I cried my eyes out completely, as did a lot of the crew and other actors.

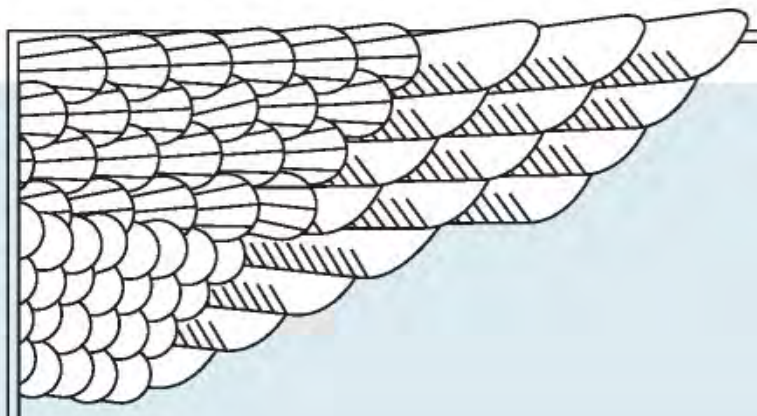
WEISS We tried to call Michelle afterwards. She wasn't answering. A week later she wrote an email saying, "Sorry, I haven't been able to talk to anybody because I've been so shattered."

CHAPLIN Michelle's scream was like, "That's it." My heart was broken. I was like, "I'm never watching this show again—I'm out!" And then I watched seasons 4, and 5, and 6, and 7.

DAVID BENIOFF (Showrunner) We're used to a bittersweet final moment in books and movies when a major character dies. The death speech. You don't get that here at all. There's no redemptive moment. There's just horror and slaughter. You want revenge so quickly for it, and you're not getting it. It's just like a kidney punch. That's the feeling we got in the books, and that's what we're trying to emulate on screen.

MARTIN Some of my former readers have said their life is hard; their mother is sick, their dog died, and they read fiction to escape. They don't want to get hit in the mouth with something horrible. But that's not the kind of fiction I write, in most cases. It's certainly not what Ice and Fire is. It tries to be more realistic about what life is. It has joy, but it also has pain and fear. I think the best fiction captures life in all its light and darkness.

PREVIOUS SPREAD AND THIS SPREAD: HELEN SLOAN/HBO (3)



War of th

Tyrion may be the finest wordsmith in Westeros, but he isn't the only one. We scoured

"NEVER FORGET WHAT YOU ARE. THE REST OF THE WORLD WILL NOT.

"Any man who must say, 'I am the king,' is no true king. I'll make

"The things I do for love."

—**JAIME** *to Cersei, while pushing Bran out of a tower when he sees the two siblings, um, getting intimate*

"If you think this has a happy ending,

"YOU'RE GOING TO DIE TOMORROW, LORD BOLTON. SLEEP WELL." —**SANSA***'s drop-the-mic promise to her horribly abusive*

"YES. ALL MEN MUST DIE, BUT WE ARE NOT MEN."

—*A feminist-as-hell* **DAENERYS** *offering an upside to Missandei on the impending war*

"CHAOS ISN'T A PIT.

"TELL CERSEI. I WANT HER TO KNOW IT WAS ME." —*Shade queen* **OLENNA TYRELL** *asking Jaime, upon her death, to inform*

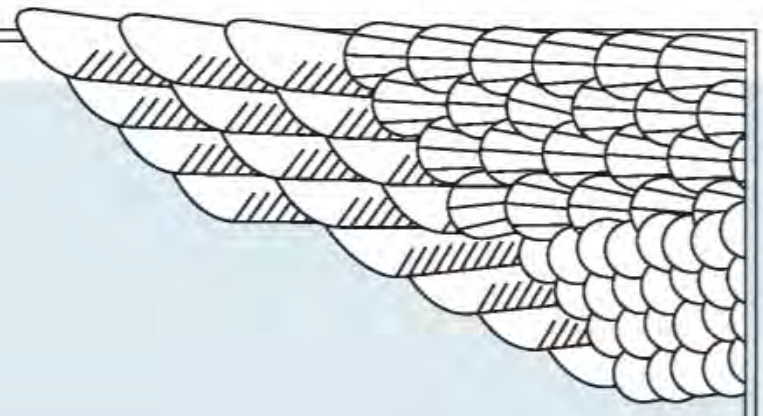
"I don't plan on knitting by the fire while men fight for me. I might be small, Lord Glover, and I might be a girl,

"YOU KNOW NOTHING, JON SNOW."

—**YGRITTE***'s catchphrase of sorts for her sometime enemy/sometime lover*

"WHEN YOU PLAY THE GAME OF THRONES, YOU

he Words



the Seven Kingdoms to find the 15 best quotes of the series. ◆ *A girl has no byline*

WEAR IT LIKE ARMOR, AND IT CAN NEVER BE USED TO HURT YOU."
—**TYRION***'s sage advice to Jon about being a bastard*

sure you understand that when I've won your war for you."
—*Patriarch* **TYWIN** *putting his grandson Joffrey in his place after he throws a tantrum when Tyrion speaks to him disrespectfully*

"THERE IS ONLY ONE THING WE SAY TO DEATH: NOT TODAY."
—*Swordsman extraordinaire* **SYRIO FOREL** *to Arya, while teaching her how to fight*

"That's what I do: I drink and I know things." —**TYRION** *on how he knows dragons won't fare well in captivity (his reason's good enough for us)*

you haven't been paying attention."
—*A sadistic* **RAMSAY** *to the subject of his torture, Theon Greyjoy*

husband, Ramsay, ahead of the Battle of the Bastards

"THE MAN WHO PASSES THE SENTENCE SHOULD SWING THE SWORD."
—*The honorable* **NED STARK** *explaining to Bran why he had to kill a Night's Watch deserter*

CHAOS IS A LADDER."
—*A devilish* **LITTLEFINGER** *to Varys on power and his intention to seize it*

Cersei that she was the mastermind behind Joffrey's murder

but I am every bit as much a Northerner as you...and I don't need your permission to defend the North."
—**LYANNA MORMONT** *shutting down Lord Glover when he opposes Jon's plan to train everyone from 10 to 60 to fight*

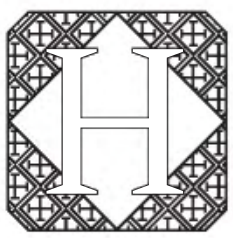
"WINTER IS COMING."
—**ANYONE** *who's anyone*

WIN OR YOU DIE. THERE IS NO MIDDLE GROUND."
—**CERSEI** *telling Ned he made a big mistake by not taking the Iron Throne when he had the shot*

Jorah's Out Here Stuntin'

Stunt coordinator Rowley Irlam reveals what goes into some of the show's best fight sequences.

— By Devan Coggan —



HAVING WORKED ON *GAME OF THRONES* since season 5, stunt coordinator Rowley Irlam has a pretty succinct description of his job: "I always want the audience to sit there, and when they see something, to go, 'Aww, f--- me,'" he says with a laugh. "I'm always trying for the 'f--- me' moment."

Irlam and his team choreograph and execute each of the show's major action moments, from exhilarating sword fights (like Arya and Brienne's sparring session in season 7) to massive war sequences (like season 6's Battle of the Bastards). For a show with so many combat scenes, Irlam's challenge is to make each one feel unique, whether means that's dropping Jorah Mormont (Iain Glen) in the Meereen fighting pits against multitalented opponents or choreographing Ser Arthur Dayne's (Luke Roberts) two-handed sword attack for the Tower of Joy flashback scene.

Irlam has a team of expert stuntpeople, but he also works with the actors on their combat techniques. "They've cast some very talented actors that can actually do their own fights," he says. Although, occasionally the players can get a little *too* enthusiastic. "Sometimes you have to hold them back a little," he says. For

Illustration by **ROBERT ALTBAUER**

instance, "Kristofer [Hivju, who plays Tormund] is very full-on, but in a very positive way. He'll go, 'Hey, Rowley, I've got this great idea. I think I'm gonna jump on this guy and kick this guy in the head!' And you have to go, 'No, no, Kristofer, we can't do that.'" As for Jorah, "Iain Glen is a very serious actor, and he's very physical," says Irlam, who adds that the stuntpeople who work with Glen call their bumps and bruises a "Jorah badge of honor."

Despite all the fisticuffs, Irlam must ensure everything is meticulously planned so there are no serious injuries. "It needs to look like a complete maniacal riot, but you have to make sure that no one gets so much as a chipped tooth or a sprained ankle," he says. "We're trying to make it look as dangerous as possible, but we also try to keep it as safe as possible."

One of the ways Irlam does that is by using a safe word rarely heard in Westeros. "When we're doing these battles and people are screaming and crying and dying, you might not know if anyone's in trouble," he explains. "So our safe word was always 'banana.' If someone started shouting 'Banana!' at the top of their voice, you'd know they're in trouble."

HELEN SLOAN/HBO

Stay gold, Dragonboy, stay gold

5-MINUTE Oral History

Viserys' Crown

Harry Lloyd, who played the heir to House Targaryen, recalls filming his death at the hands of Khal Drogo. • **AS TOLD TO NICK ROMANO**

"IT WAS PRETTY MUCH THE LAST thing I shot. It was in Belfast, and we're pretending we're in this balmy desert tent. It was freezing cold and we spent all day doing this big sequence. Everyone else was inside by the campfire, and I start outside in every take.

On this soundstage I had this chair set up, this huge big snow coat that I put on over my costume. I would sit there with my honey and ginger hot tea to keep warm because I was screaming a lot. I'm pretty sure I raided my hotel minibar and kept pumping up my tea with a little bit of whiskey, because it was a long day and it put the taste of alcohol in your mouth. Pretending to be drunk at nine in the morning, that was my little secret....

During our lunch, I rehearsed the breaking of the arm with stuntmen on the next-door set, which was the Iron Throne, which I thought was quite ironic.... All of the actual gold stuff was done quite quickly at the end. You only really get one or two attempts with the costume. Then I put on a gold hat that they molded [for] the final shot. [Makeup designer] Paul Engelen, we had a very quick session to put all the burn makeup on, and then we had a funny smoke machine that I wore around my neck with this gold paint.... I think it was paint with a little gelatin or something in it to make it more thick and goopy.... We were runnning out of time, and if it hadn't been stressful and hot and sweaty and dirty, it would've been quite nice pouring this heavy liquid on."

Jason Momoa drops his knives before dropping the mic

5-MINUTE Oral History

Jason Momoa's Tongue Lashing

The actor explains the quiet menace of Khal Drogo's final fight. • **AS TOLD TO NICK ROMANO**

"I'M DOING THAT SCENE WHERE I CUT THE GUY'S throat [in season 1, episode 8] and I pull the guy's tongue out. He's actually my stunt double from *Conan* [*the Barbarian*] who doesn't speak English, but I had to teach him to speak Dothraki. He spoke Bulgarian. It was challenging. The director was like, 'You hired him, you gotta teach him.' My daughter was with me on set. I love taking [my kids] everywhere, but I'm covered in blood, and she's sitting there knitting with the wardrobe department. She's so cute. I'm like, 'Hi, baby!' 'I love you, Papa!' Then I'd go and be like, 'Raaaa!' She was, like, 4 years old. 'Papa's just playing'—not fazed by it at all.... I have the souvenir of the tongue and the throat. That's just on my desk. I called up [showrunners] Dan [Weiss] and David [Benioff]. I think it was one of the first scenes that was never in the book, and George [R.R. Martin] called me out on it, I think while we were doing the [Comic-Con] panel. I always wanted to see [Khal Drogo] go to battle. I didn't want to do some elaborate fight scene. I think it's [just as] intimidating to whisper in someone's ear and go, 'Stop that.' You can just parry; I don't need to do any fight moves. Then you just take the guy's sword and slice his throat out. I was like, 'We can get a chicken breast, and we'll just cover my hand in blood, and that'll do it.' And then within days they had this f---ing throat and tongue attachment, and it looked amazing."

Fan Favorite

Lady Olenna

An ode to a Game of Thrones *icon, House Tyrell's tart-tongued matriarch.* • **BY NICK ROMANO**

Every rose has its thorn, and as the Queen of Thorns, the regal Dame Diana Rigg became a fan favorite with her first acerbic quip about "cream" and "udders." But she had "no idea" her performance would draw in a new army of fans, decades after her days as a Bond Girl and as Emma Peel in *The Avengers*.

"Obviously, it's great that has happened," she says. "The young, I don't expect them to know about my past, but if, through *Game of Thrones*, they discover me, that's good."

Westeros was once unknown to Rigg, but the scripts won her over—plus free trips to Croatia and Belfast. "I loved the complexity of Olenna," she recalls. "She played the game brilliantly. Anything and everything executed ruthlessly for the survival of her family."

The actress doesn't miss her role, per se. Rigg chalks it up to the nature of her profession—"you move on."

"I was extremely grateful that I didn't die on the lavatory or in some rather undignified manner," she chuckles. "The fact that I'd been kept alive far longer than the original author intended seemed to me that I had a pretty good run for my money."

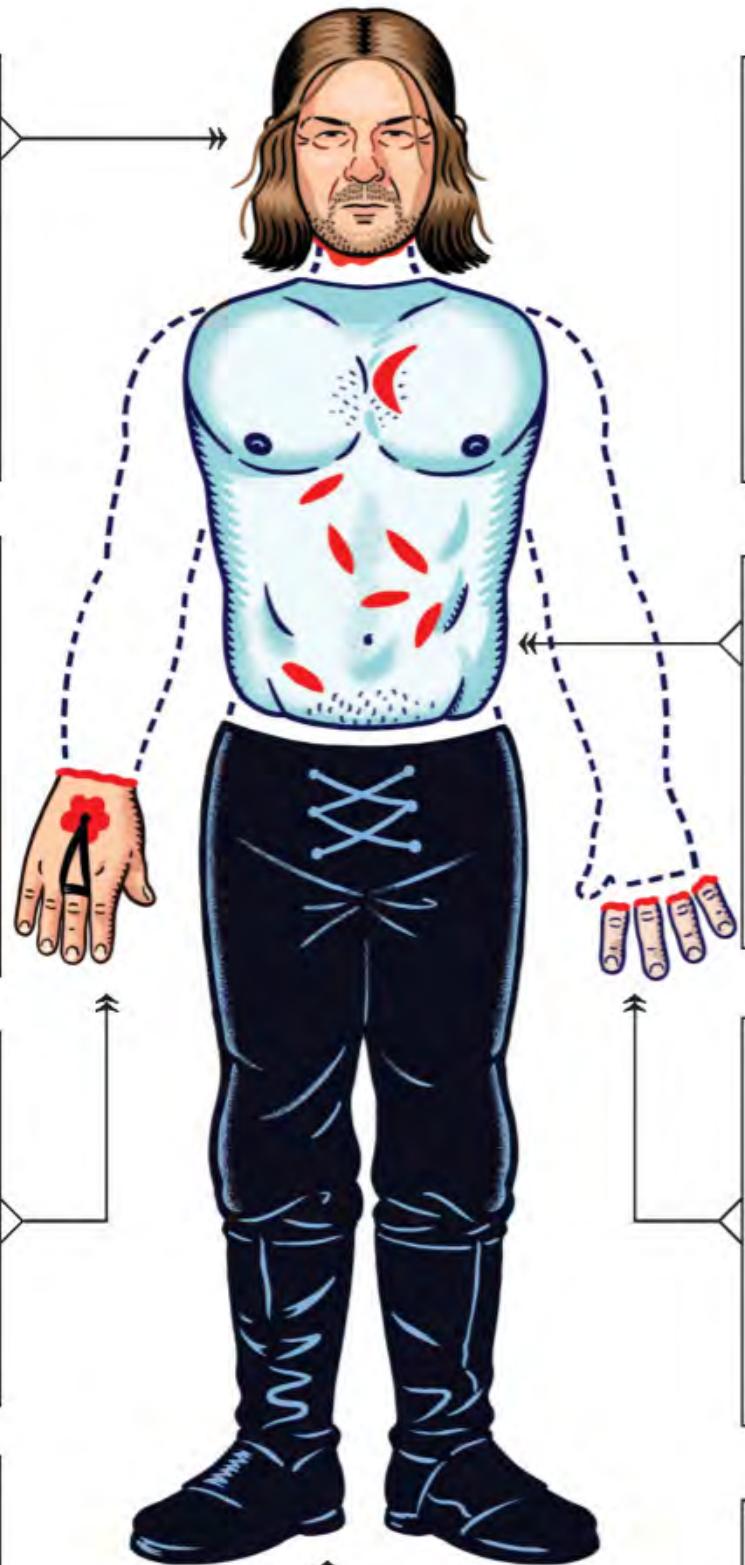
The internet memes, about which Rigg still knows nothing, can attest to that.

Olenna (Diana Rigg) had some famous last words, indeed

GAME OF THRONES: HELEN SLOAN/HBO (2); RIGG: WALTER MCBRIDE/WIREIMAGE

Pieces of Me

Game of Thrones loves a good amputation. In fact, there have been so many injured and/or fully severed body parts over the years that we can nearly form an entire human out of them. ◆ *By Samantha Highfill*



Ned Stark's head

The noble Ned Stark lost his head in the show's first season when Joffrey Baratheon—the new king following Robert Baratheon's death—went against his mother Cersei's plan and executed the Lord of Winterfell and Hand of the King.

Ilyn Payne's tongue

The Mad King ordered Ilyn Payne's tongue removed after he suggested that Tywin Lannister, then Hand of the King, was the true ruler of Westeros. A tongueless Payne would go on to become the royal executioner for Robert Baratheon.

Cersei Lannister's hair

After confessing to committing adultery, Cersei was forced to perform a walk of atonement, a public ritual of punishment and penance in the Faith of the Seven. To do so, her beautiful locks were chopped off.

Jon Snow's torso

After Lord Commander Snow granted the Wildlings safe passage into the Seven Kingdoms to escape the White Walkers, Night's Watch loyalists granted their daggers safe passage into his chest.

Jaime Lannister's hand

Jaime was one of the deadliest swordsmen in all of Westeros—at least until Locke, a henchman aligned with House Bolton, took the Kingslayer's sword hand.

Davos Seaworth's fingers

It was Stannis Baratheon who removed Davos Seaworth's fingers as punishment for smuggling. It was also Stannis who knighted Davos. Relationships are complicated.

Lord Varys/Grey Worm/Theon Greyjoy's penises

Westeros has a history of ridding men of their manhoods, whether we're talking Lord Varys' horror story, Grey Worm's life as a member of the Unsullied, or Theon Greyjoy's truly unfortunate time spent with the demented Ramsay Snow.

Bran Stark's legs

Bran's legs are still technically attached to his body, but he stopped being ambulatory after his fall in the show's pilot left him paralyzed.

Oberyn Martell's eyes

When Oberyn, on a quest to avenge his sister's death, agreed to be Tyrion's champion in a trial by combat, he was paired against Gregor Clegane, a.k.a. the Mountain. Although the Red Viper of Dorne was agile, the Mountain's strength ultimately got the best of him when Clegane crushed his skull.

Illustration by **KYLE HILTON**

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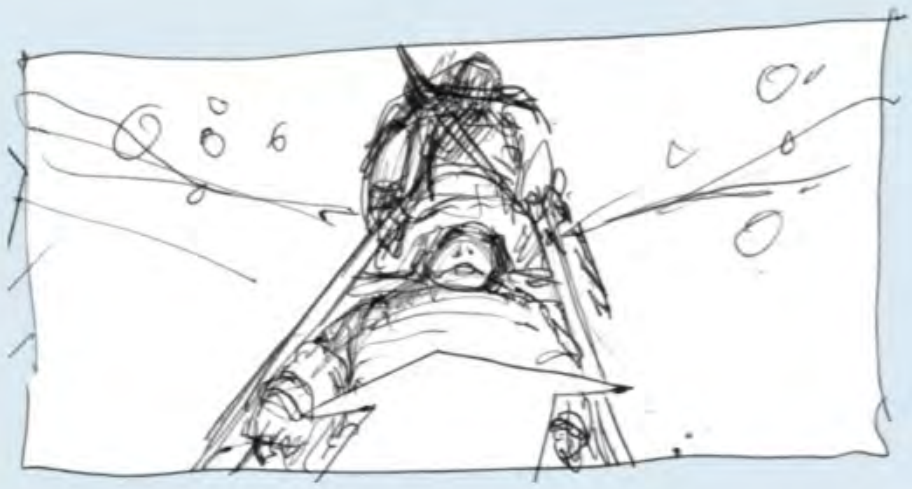

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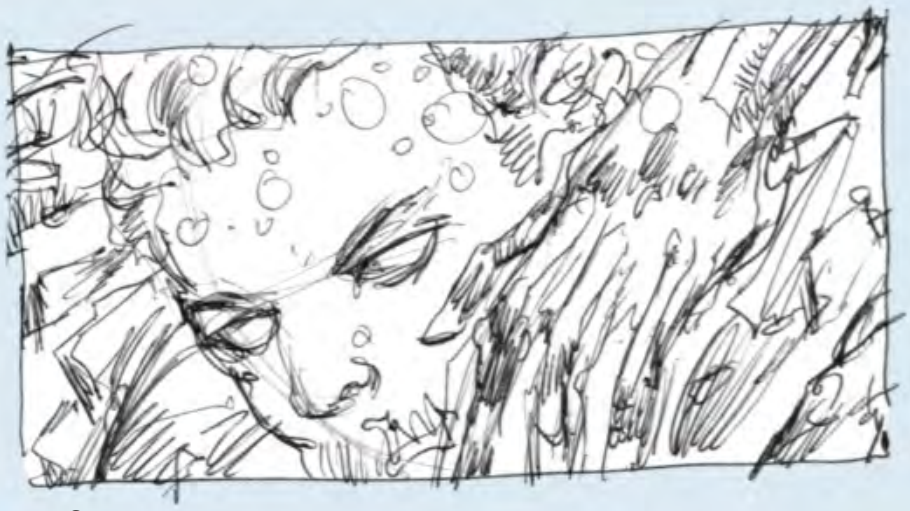

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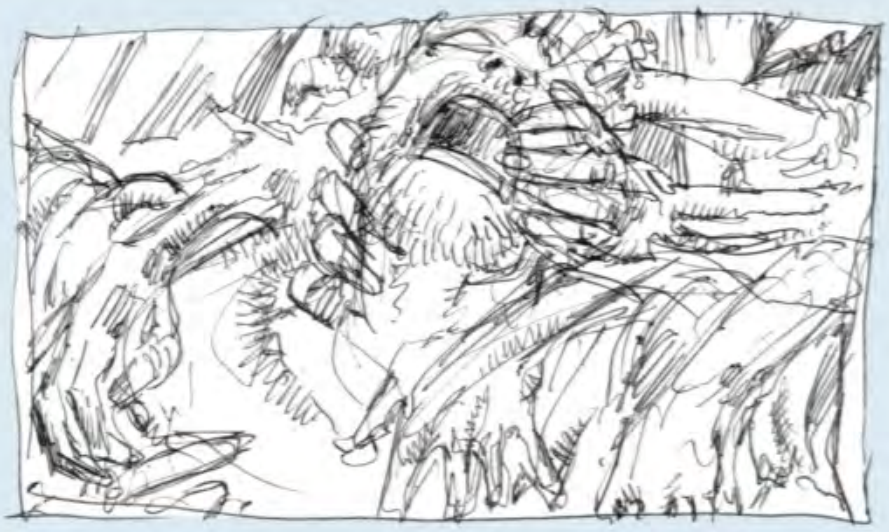

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Page to Screen

Drawn of the Dead

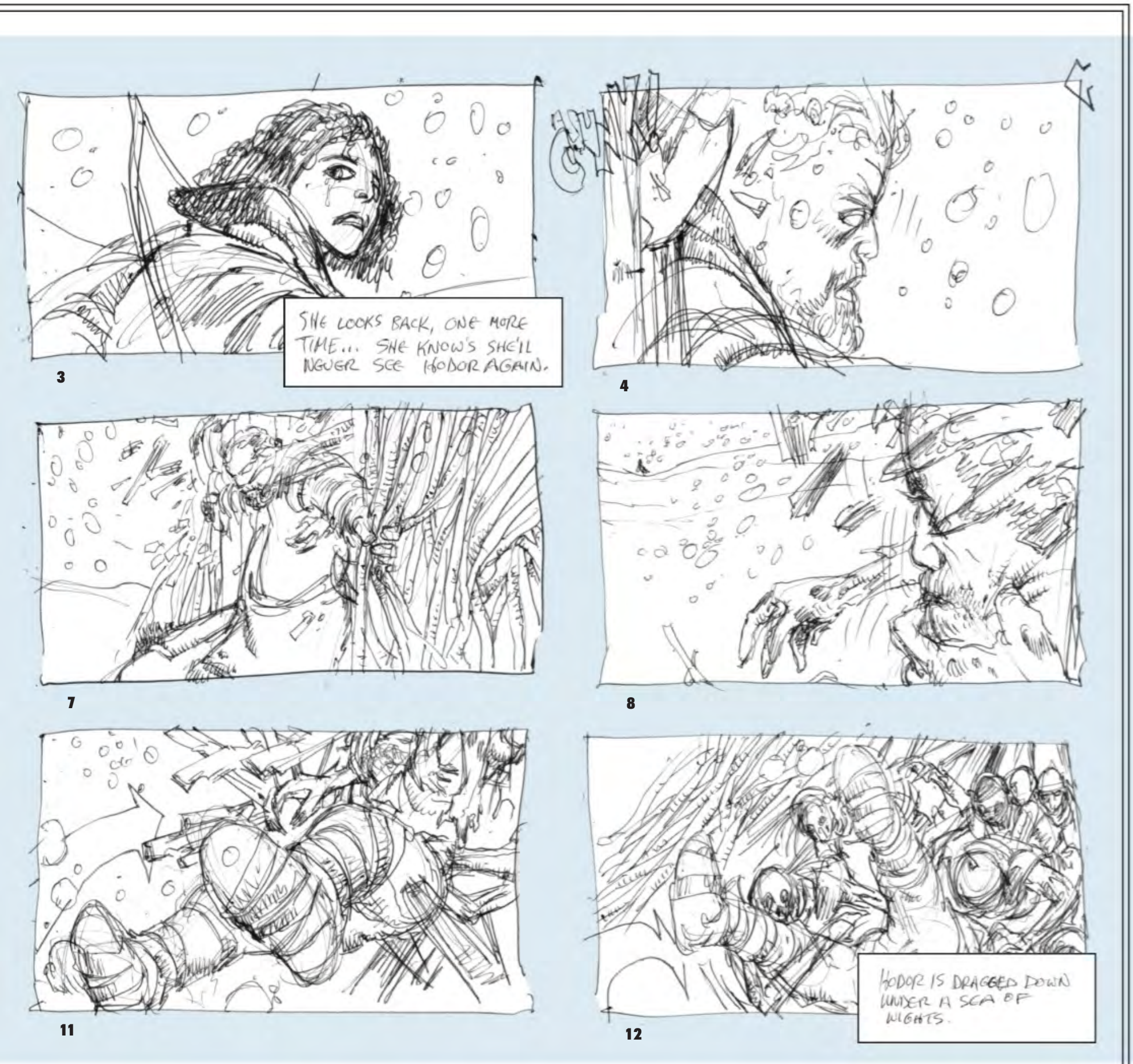
The "hold the door" sequence, in which Hodor and others die to help Bran escape from the Night King, might be the most tragic scene in *GoT* history. Here's how it came to life.

— By Christian Holub —

BEFORE AN EPISODE of *Game of Thrones* is even filmed, storyboard artists like Will Simpson draw out scenes from the script to help directors see how best to convey the action in visual form. Season 6's "The Door" posed a challenge because it all has to build up to Hodor holding that door shut against the Night King's army.

"When you read the scripts, you realize the importance of certain moments,"

STORYBOARDS: WILL SIMPSON/HBO (12); *GAME OF THRONES*: HBO



Hodor (Kristian Nairn) holds the door

Simpson says. "You want a character to go out well. I'm getting myself invested in the characters. I want to feel it in the drawings, so that when a director looks at it, it helps with the next step."

The sequence plays out like a series of last stands, as the direwolf Summer, the Three-Eyed Raven, and the Children of the Forest all sacrifice themselves to buy Meera and Bran time. Each death is more horrific than the last, building up to Hodor's tragic finale.

"The way I drew him is with his back to the door, and then the hands come through to grab him," Simpson says. "We've seen that kind of thing in horror movies, but it was so important. The fact they have to get further away while he's doing that, and Hodor's gonna be left there, is so awful. And yet that's always been his destiny. In the past, when he's been living a happy life as a big guy saying 'Hodor,' we didn't know that's the future hitting the past until that moment."

BY George

Author George R.R. Martin reflects on the final season (and what it means for his books).

— By James Hibberd —

GEORGE R.R. MARTIN'S MASTERWORK fantasy saga is set to reveal its epic conclusion on HBO, and not on the printed page where he launched his tale 23 years ago. Naturally, Martin has "mixed feelings about that."

"It's been an incredible ride," the author, 70, says. "And almost all of it has been great. Obviously, I wish I'd finished these books sooner so the show hadn't gotten ahead of me. I never anticipated that."

Martin has famously struggled for eight years and counting to finish the sixth book in his A Song of Ice and Fire series, *The Winds of Winter*, with no publication date set. There's also a planned seventh novel, *A Dream of Spring*. On paper, the sprawling epic, detailing a clash of kingdoms in Westeros and Essos, halted in 2011's *A Dance With Dragons* with the cliff-hanger murder of Jon Snow—a twist that capped the show's season 5 finale in 2015.

Since then, it's been unclear how closely the show's story line hews to Martin's future books. Years ago, Martin explained to *GoT* showrunners David Benioff and Dan Weiss his rough outline for how he plans to end his saga. But the show started making significant departures from the books well before they reached the end of his published narrative (for example, Ramsay Bolton marries a minor character in the novels, not Sansa Stark). Martin initially contributed one script per season to the series, then halted his contributions. "After season 4, George made a conscious decision to devote himself to the books," Weiss says. "Anybody who's read the books knows that task in and of itself requires about 64 hours a day to do properly, and the differences between the show and the books became difficult to track in parallel—it's almost like he was in a weird science-fiction movie trying to keep two similar-but-different universes in his mind at the same time."

The producers previously told EW one dramatic season 6 scene—the tragic reveal of Hodor's backstory—came directly from their talks with the author. And Jon Snow's parentage is almost certainly the same as his plan. But the rest of Martin's narrative is a mystery, which is how the showrunners hope to keep it.

"[The concern] used to be that the books would spoil the show for people—and luckily it did not for the most part," Benioff says. "Now that the show is ahead of the books, it seems the show could ruin the books for people. So one thing we've talked to George about is that we're not going to tell people what the differences are, so when those books come out, people can experience them fresh."

> *"I wish I'd finished these books sooner so the show hadn't gotten ahead of me."*
>
> —GEORGE R.R. MARTIN

The showrunners note that they're not entirely sure of Martin's future story lines anyway ("George discovers a lot of stuff while he's writing," Benioff says). But more surprising is that Martin is likewise somewhat in the dark on the show's ending. "I haven't read the [final-season] scripts and haven't been able to visit the set because I've been working on *Winds*," Martin reveals. "I know some of the things. But there's a lot of minor-character [arcs] they'll be coming up with on their own. And, of course, they passed me several years ago. There may be important discrepancies."

Benioff and Weiss invited Martin to film a cameo in Northern Ireland for the final episodes. He had previously filmed an appearance in the show's original pilot, playing a guest in Dany's wedding. But subsequent reshoots resulted in his footage being scrapped. "I was tempted to do [the final-season cameo]," Martin says. "But I didn't think, just for the sake of a cameo, I could take the time to return to Belfast."

So for now, Martin will continue to work on *Winds*, and watch along with his fans as the television version of his saga that has obsessed millions around the world reaches its climactic finale.

"It's the end for a lot of people," Martin says. "It's not the end for me. I'm still deeply in it. I better live a long time because I have a lot of work left to do."

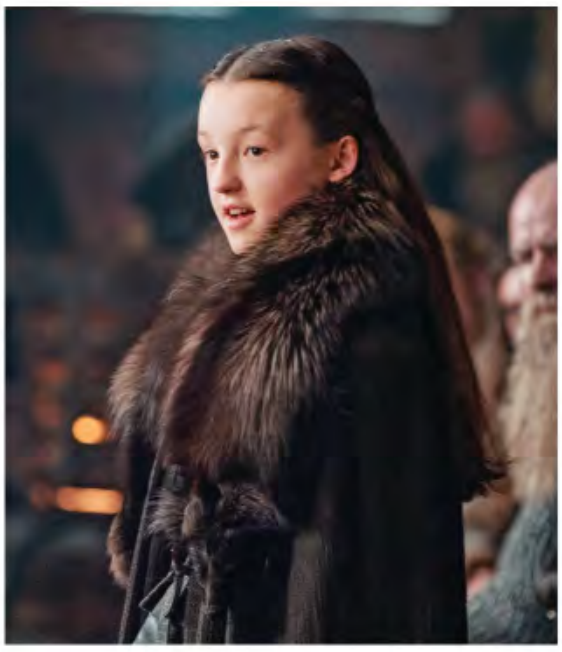
CHRISTOPHER ANDERSON/MAGNUM PHOTO

Fan Favorite

Lyanna Mormont

Bella Ramsey was at school when her mom arrived to tell the young actress she'd been cast as the fierce Lady Lyanna Mormont in *Game of Thrones*' sixth season. Diligent parenting meant Ramsey hadn't seen a single episode. "I was so excited!" says Ramsey, who was just 11 years old at the time. "My mum was like, 'Shhh, you're not allowed to tell anyone!'" With the help of her older sister, Ramsey familiarized herself with the story, watching snippets from the seven seasons—"I'll watch the rest when I'm 18"—but when she got on set (her first ever), things were just as unfamiliar. "I was overwhelmed by the amount of people," she says. To overcome any nerves, Ramsey channeled Lyanna's tenacious spirit. "I'm not that confident, really, but when I was her, I was," she explains. "I love her defiance; she's a badass." A couple of empowering speeches later, Ramsey's Lyanna was a fan favorite, being addressed as "M'lady" on the street. Even the King in the North can't help but admire her. "One of the first times I ever interacted with Kit [Harington], I had my spotty Doc Martens on," she remembers. "He called me 'dude' and told me they were cool!" And they say Jon Snow knows nothing. —*Ruth Kinane*

"Shaming all those grown men was supercool," says Bella Ramsey



Gendry (Joe Dempsie) back in King's Landing after several seasons in a rowboat

5-MINUTE Oral History

Gendry's Hammer Time

Joe Dempsie opens up about wielding Gendry's massive hammer and his endless rowing.

— By Devan Coggan —

JOE DEMPSIE KNOWS HE ONLY HAS HIMSELF to blame for those rowing jokes. Gendry, King Robert's bastard son, disappeared in season 3, last seen in a rowboat making his way to King's Landing. So when Dempsie fired off a tweet after season 4 ended—"still rowin'"—the meme spread like, well, wildfire. "It became my daily life," he admits with a laugh. "There was no escaping it."

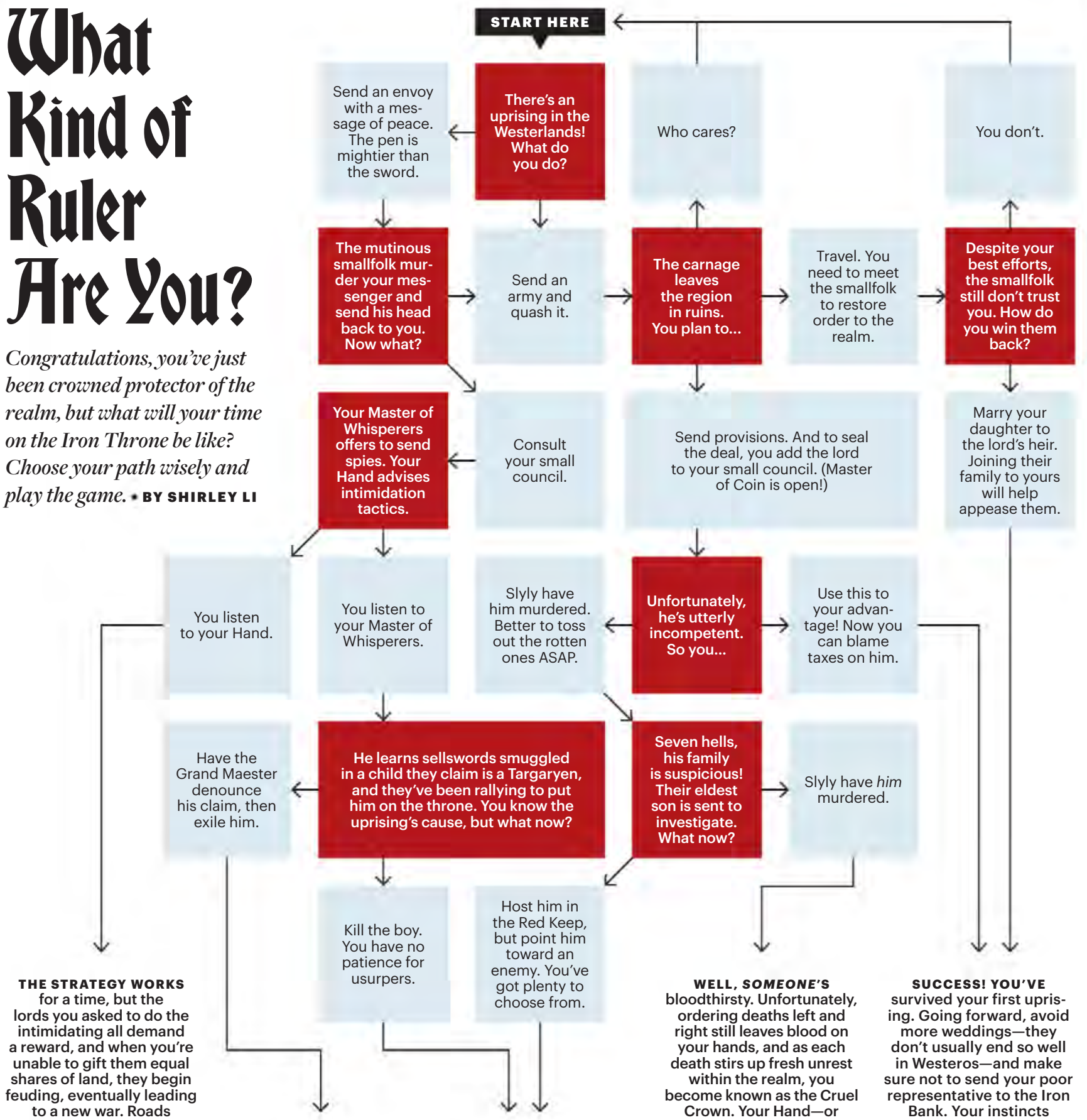
Showrunners David Benioff and D.B. Weiss promised Dempsie that they planned to bring Gendry back, but as seasons passed, he wondered whether it would really happen—until he got the call for season 7. "It almost felt like a new job because the influence and the impact of the show changed so much over those years," he explains. "It was like getting a call out of the blue, saying, 'Hey, so do you fancy stepping into the biggest TV show on the planet?'" Returning to Westeros also brought new challenges: Season 7 finds Gendry venturing north of the Wall with his new warhammer, and the stunt team told him to build his strength by practicing with a real hammer. He did—only to be handed a fake foam hammer when he got to set. "I spent probably three months like a psychopath in my garden, swinging a sledgehammer around," he says, laughing. "So I was the strongest I've ever been, trying to make a foam hammer look heavy." Hey, it beats rowing.

HELEN SLOAN/HBO (2)

MOST EPISODE APPEARANCES • Tyrion Lannister: 61; Cersei Lannister: 58; Jon Snow: 56; Daenerys Targaryen: 56; Sansa Stark: 54; Arya Stark: 53; Jaime

What Kind of Ruler Are You?

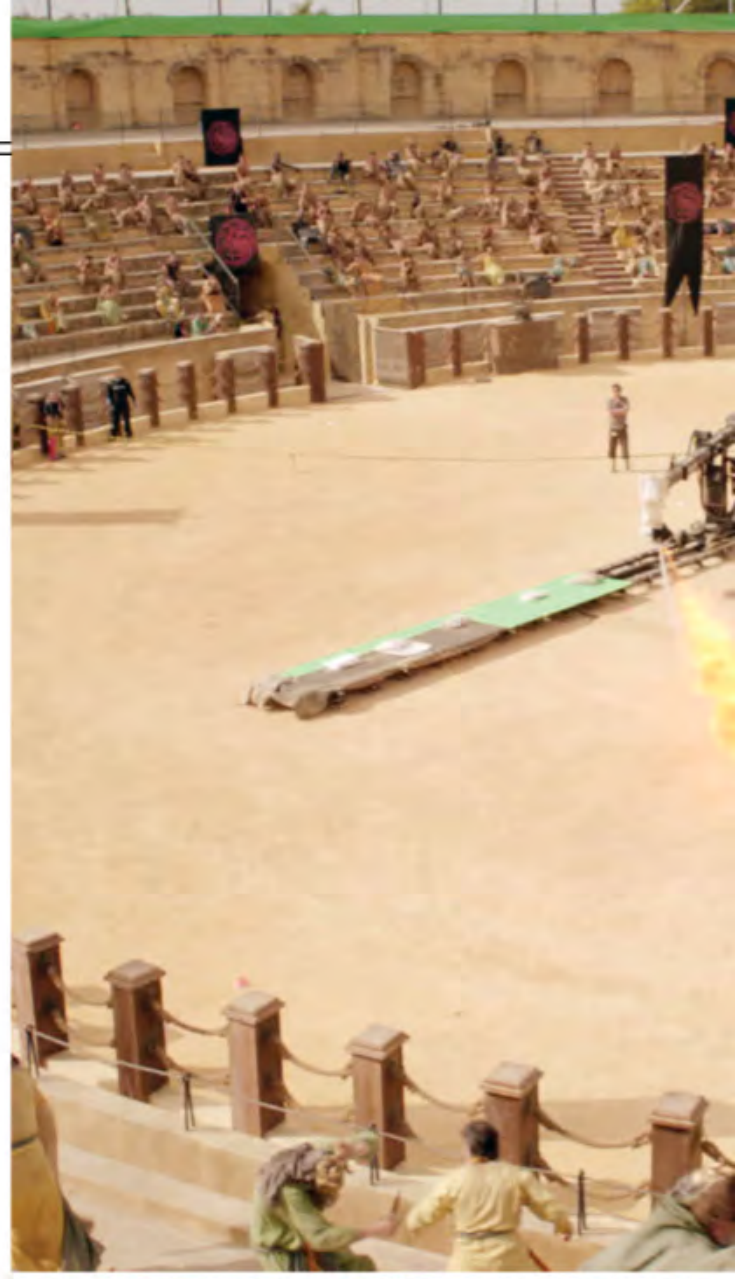
Congratulations, you've just been crowned protector of the realm, but what will your time on the Iron Throne be like? Choose your path wisely and play the game. • **BY SHIRLEY LI**



Lannister: 49; Ser Jorah Mormont: 48; Samwell Tarly: 43; Theon Greyjoy: 43; Littlefinger: 41; Varys: 41; Brienne of Tarth: 37; Ser Davos Seaworth: 36

HOW'D THEY Do That?

On a show where every death is unimaginably gruesome and flying dragons are the size of 747s, we asked the special-effects team how they confront challenges that seem as insurmountable as a magical 700-foot wall of ice. ◆ *By Ruth Kinane*



"You have the best people working on those fire stunts, but it's still nerve-racking," VFX supervisor Joe Bauer says of filming sequences like the fighting pit scene in the season 5 episode "The Dance of Dragons." "But all of the departments are so top-notch that if anybody was in my position and said, 'We'll just do it all CG,' they'd be making a huge mistake."

"IT ALL STARTS WITH OPENING A script and reading, 'There are giants riding mammoths' or 'Dany climbs on Drogon and they roar off to safety,'" says visual-effects producer Steve Kullback. "You close the script and go, 'Holy hell, how are we going to do that?'" Along with VFX supervisor Joe Bauer, Kullback has to find a way to raise hairs on viewers' arms whenever Rhaegal breathes fire, or send shivers down our spines every time the Night King levels an icy gaze. And yet the duo is undeterred by the high expectations. As Bauer puts it: "We read the script and we get to work."

Both Kullback and Bauer credit having the means to physically create as much as possible on set for their ability to make even the most jaw-dropping moments seem realistic. "The bible for our methodology is to work with as much photography as we can," explains Kullback. "Then any CG added in has to be dialed in to look like the photography. It makes the visual effects not bump against the rest of production." Okay, but surely when it comes to, for example, setting a man on fire, some things have to be faked? That reminds Kullback of one of his favorite stories from the fighting pit in Meereen. "We needed to have a dragon blasting fire at 20 Harpies and light them all up at once," he says. "We were kicking around ideas, and Joe says, 'Well, it's clear that we need to do it for real.'" Laughs Bauer, "And I didn't get fired for saying that!" Not only

HBO (3)

"We have to think about what these creatures would need in battle just as much as how to make them beautiful," says Bauer

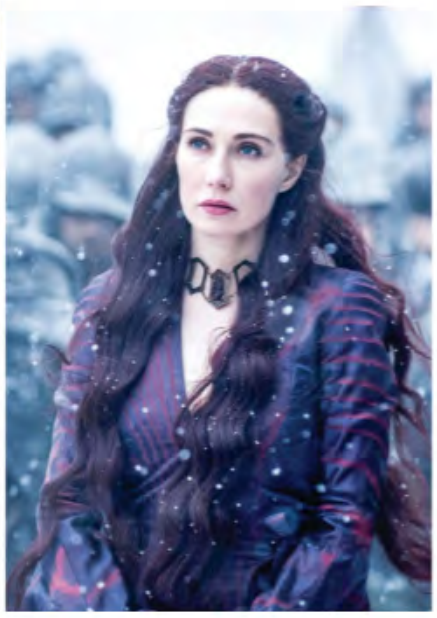
did he keep his job, the guys made it happen by attaching a flamethrower to a motion-controlled camera crane. "We animated the crane to match the movement of the dragon, then set fire to the stunt guys," says Kullback. "Twenty-two was the new record for people ignited all at one time. Thank God no one has gotten hurt."

From ice to fire, and all that's in between, perhaps Bauer and Kullback's work is so effective because, between them and their creative teams, they've done their research to keep things as "real" as possible, including meticulously studying the degrees of decay on a dead body. But the matter of those enormous beasts that fly around and breathe fire is admittedly harder to bluff.

Early on, showrunners Dan Weiss and David Benioff requested a chart of the increasing scale of the dragons from seasons 3 to 7. "Up until season 7 they doubled in size every year, but they would've become Godzilla if they'd doubled again for 8, so we decided that was enough," Bauer says. In terms of performance, Dany's dragons have gone from bratty kids picking on one another to flying killing machines, and yet they still have to appear endearing to the audience. "When Viserion gets the spear through him and crashes and dies, it was really gratifying how shocked and sad people were," says Bauer. "It's rare for CG characters to register on an emotional level without spectacle and gore."

While bringing the dragons to life can leave behind a warm glow, killing off characters often leaves Bauer and Kullback as distraught as the viewers. "It's the worst part of the job," says Bauer, who remembers analyzing photos of the effects of poison on the human body before shooting Joffrey's death scene. "There's all kinds of juicy photo references we can dig into." And the hardest stuff yet? "Researching for 'Battle of the Bastards,'" Bauer says. "We needed horses to really get damaged, broken legs, etc.—so inevitably you have to watch horse races where the horse goes down and over, head first. Some of the research is so graphic that we have to put a warning on it."

As for a warning when it comes to season 8, all Bauer will tease is that everything we've seen so far will be doubled. Adds Kullback: "A good way to characterize this season is, everything goes to s---."



Maggy (Jodhi May, left) is the bearer of bad news; Melisandre (Carice van Houten) has a mixed prophecy record

Prophet-ability

A guide to the two biggest prophecies and what clues they reveal about the final season. ◆ *By Evan Lewis*

A FITTING SUBTITLE FOR THIS FRANCHISE COULD BE this warning from Red Priestess Melisandre: "Prophecies are dangerous things." From greensight to visions in the flame, plenty of portents have come and gone on the show, and fans—as desperate for vindication of their various theories as any would-be monarch for the throne—have picked each cryptic message apart.

The Prince That Was Promised

"After the long summer, darkness will fall heavy on the world. Stars will bleed.... The cold breath of winter will freeze the seas.... And the dead shall rise in the north.... A warrior will draw a burning sword from the fire, and that sword shall be Lightbringer." —Melisandre

STATUS Summer has ended, and the dead have risen, but the identity of the prophesied savior who will wield Lightbringer against the darkness is still open to interpretation, as is the nature of the legendary weapon itself. Melisandre explains that the one who ends the war will be "the prince that was promised," but Daenerys' adviser Missandei has pointed out that this phrase, translated from High Valyrian, could mean either "prince" or "princess." The two front-runners under this gender-neutral interpretation are Dany and Jon Snow, whom the Lord of Light resurrected. As for bleeding stars, they may refer to Dany and the red comet that heralded the birth of her dragons. Or they could refer to Dawn, the fallen-star-forged sword that Arthur Dayne used to protect Jon's mother, Lyanna Stark, as she gave birth to her Targaryen heir at the Tower of Joy, as seen in Bran's vision.

Gold Will Be Their Shrouds

"You will never wed the prince, you will wed the king.... You will be queen, for a time. Then comes another—younger, more beautiful—to cast you down and take all you hold dear.... The king will have 20 children, and you will have three. Gold will be their crowns, gold their shrouds." —Maggy the Frog to young Cersei Lannister

STATUS Much of this blood-magic-infused prophecy has come true. Cersei married King Robert Baratheon instead of Prince Rhaegar Targaryen. The younger, more beautiful queen might've been Margaery Tyrell, but since her vaporization, more likely it is Daenerys instead. King Robert had numerous children out of wedlock; Cersei had three doomed, golden-haired royals. One thing that could impugn this prophecy's accuracy: if Cersei's current (alleged?) pregnancy comes to term.

HELEN SLOAN/HBO (2)

POLL OF *THRONES* ◆ We want to hear from you: What is the best episode? Who had the most epic death? Who is the best-dressed character? Visit ***ew.com/gotpoll***

Page to Screen

The Hound Saves Tormund

The untold story of how Tormund nearly met a watery demise while hunting for a wight in season 6. • **BY CHRISTIAN HOLUB**

Director Alan Taylor knew where he wanted certain characters to end up over the course of Jon Snow and his friends' excursion in "Beyond the Wall," but he left a lot of the details up to Will Simpson. Looking over the script, the storyboard artist was struck by the lack of mortal danger for the major characters involved.

"It was a good, solid fight, but there was so much potential to drop somebody into serious trouble," Simpson says. "So because I really like Tormund, I was like, 'Let's nearly kill Tormund!' I told Alan, 'Let's pull him onto the ice, and it looks like he's about to go, and then the Hound grabs him.' I have to be pleased with myself, because I was the one who committed to getting Tormund into trouble. I thought it was important that we think one of our heroes is gonna die here, not just the 'red shirt' guys."

Simpson's storyboards originated the plot point of the Hound saving Tormund during battle

STORYBOARDS: WILL SIMPSON/HBO; NIGHT KING: HBO; FURDIK: HELEN SLOAN/HBO

to take our reader poll to answer these questions and more.

The White Walker leader facing down Jon Snow in "Beyond the Wall"

The Night King Speaks

Fans first glimpsed the mysterious origins of the Night King, the mute menace of the icy North, in a flashback set thousands of years ago, when the Children of the Forest tied a man to a tree and pierced his heart with dragonglass, creating a demon to unleash upon their enemies, the First Men. In the final season, the Night King is bringing war to Winterfell, and EW got Slovak actor and stuntman Vladimir Furdik (who's played him since season 6) to break his vow of silence.

What stunts can we see you doing on *Thrones* before you became the Night King?
I did a lot of horse falls, fire drops, high falls, sword fights. I doubled for Arthur Dayne [for the Tower of Joy fight scene]. I'm one of the men jumping from the boat in the fire [during Daenerys' dragon attack].

How did you come to take over the role?
I don't really know why they cast me. When we did season 5, I was the White Walker who fought Jon Snow [in "Hardhome"]—the first time Jon Snow killed a White Walker, that was me. After that, [showrunners David Benioff and Dan Weiss] asked if I'd play the Night King for seasons 6 through 8. I never asked why.

What sort of acting directions do you get? He doesn't blink much, I've noticed.
Every director has a different vision of how to play him. Dan and David want him to be like a cold man, some of the directors want to show that there's some human in him. Yes, many times they ask me don't try to blink your eyes. This is very difficult.

What does the Night King want, anyway?
Somebody made him the Night King. Nobody knows who he was before—a soldier or part of [nobility]. He never wanted to be the Night King. I think he wants revenge. Everybody in this story has two sides—a bad side and a good side. The Night King only has one side, a bad side.

What can we expect from him in the final season?
People will see he has a target he wants to kill, and you will find out who that is. There's also that moment [in "Hardhome"] when Jon Snow was on the boat and the Night King looked at him and raised his arms—there's a similar and even stronger moment between Jon and the Night King this time.

Do you have an all-time favorite Night King scene?
That's still coming.
—James Hibberd

Blade of

Oathkeeper

One of two Valyrian steel swords made from Ned Stark's massive ancestral blade Ice, Jaime's gift to Brienne was clearly fashioned using Lannister gold, with its lions on the pommel and cross guard. Tommy Dunne forged the sword himself—sort of: He cameoed as the blacksmith in the season 4 premiere. "It was a good laugh," he says. "But it was maybe the hottest three days of my life."

Ellaria's Dagger

The one rule to designing Dornish weapons? Incorporate snakes whenever possible. Case in point: The wrist dagger Ellaria uses to kill Prince Doran features a snake head for a handle, complete with scaling and bright turquoise stones (from Dunne's own collection) to emphasize the "contrast between the bronzing and the eyes," he says.

5 Gory

Weapons master Tommy Dunne has crafted countless parts during the series—last season, he put together roughly 10,000 to 15,000 arrows—and though he teases that season 8 will feature the toughest weapon he's ever created, for now, he looks back on some key pieces from seasons past. • **BY SHIRLEY LI**

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2

3

1

Tyene's Dagger

Dunne took the snake motifs further to arm Ellaria's daughter. Tyene's preferred weapon has a handle composed of two snakes, a wavy blade to mimic their movements, and a belt and sheath made from a 22-foot-long python skin Dunne purchased from Morocco. "It's nice to see it used [this way]," he says, "rather than on somebody's wall or floor."

2

Dragonglass Dagger

To create the look of dragonglass, Dunne purchased real obsidian and molded it until he had a shape he could re-create out of rubber for the props seen on screen. "You'd never know the difference," he points out. "We created very translucent sharp edges [from rubber] and made so many shapes and looks and styles."

3

Pyat Pree's Dagger

Dunne chose this push blade, a corkscrew-like dagger, for its camera-friendliness and gory results. The warlock uses it to kill Qarth's council, spewing blood everywhere. "We didn't want to block movement when they put the blade to everybody's throats," he explains. "You had to keep your hand away from the neck so we could see everything."

4

Valyrian Steel Dagger

The blade once wielded in an attempt to assassinate Bran had to be relatively unadorned. "We couldn't put an image on it, because we didn't want anyone to know who supplied it," Dunne says. Instead he used a mix of characteristics, from a handle modeled after an antler to red stones that looked like Lannister gems—but, of course, weren't.

(PREVIOUS SPREAD AND THIS SPREAD) HELEN SLOAN/HBO (7)

4

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5

Widow's Wail

Dunne designed Joffrey's crassly named weapon (and the second sword forged from Ice) around the eye-catching red Swarovski crystal representing the Lannisters. The Baratheon-honoring antlers around it are much subtler, nearly disappearing into the cross guard as a "tongue-in-cheek" way of hinting at Joffrey's true parentage, Dunne says.

6

HELEN SLOAN/HBO (4)

6

White Walker Dagger

Wights and White Walkers use icicle-like weapons—but not just any regular icicle. While filming in Iceland, Dunne saw shards of ice that resembled stalagmites and stalactites found in caves, and molded translucent resin to look more like them. "These shards were unbelievable, just beautiful," he marvels. "I took loads of photographs for references."

7

Areo Hotah's Longaxe

Doran Martell's bodyguard wielded one of the most challenging weapons Dunne has worked on—and one of his favorites. The staff needed to look rich, so Dunne wrapped it in bronze and brass sheets; the blade needed character, so Dunne laser-cut a filigree to add onto it. "It was a beautiful item," he recalls. "I enjoyed making that."

8

Gendry's Warhammer

Dunne created rubber and foam versions of this bronze-antler-adorned, Baratheon-honoring hammer in case actor Joe Dempsie got tired of lugging it around. Dempsie, though, had no trouble carrying Gendry's weapon. "He enjoyed using the heavy one," Dunne says, adding that Dempsie had the most fun in scenes that required the weightiest version.

9

Oberyn's Spear

To mimic a snake's movements, Dunne used a kris blade—a wavy edge—wrapped a snake around it, and fashioned the tassel out of python skin. And though he made 20 spears for Oberyn's final fight, the brutal battle damaged them one by one, and Dunne nearly ran out. "I was in panic mode," he admits, laughing. "We were down to the last one."

Crushi

Pedro Pascal and Hafþór Björnsson are about to find out if size matters

ing It

It's your classic David-beats-Goliath story—until he doesn't.

Game of Thrones *delivered one of its most exhilarating and distressing scenes to date in season 4, when the acrobatic Oberyn "The Red Viper" Martell (Pedro Pascal) faced off against the hulking Gregor "The Mountain" Clegane (Hafþór Björnsson), with tragic results.*

EW gathered the cast and crew to get the inside intel on TV's most infamous head squish.

By Devan Coggan

A

ALEX GRAVES (Director) There were two big things [going into the scene]. My biggest concern was that you not see the end coming and that you would become confident that the Viper was going to win. And then the second was that I [wanted] the fighting to be more acrobatic and musical than the earlier fights in the show had been.

PEDRO PASCAL (The Red Viper) They set me up with an instructor of wushu martial arts in Los Angeles that I trained with. And then I trained with the incredible team that they had on season 4 and this brilliant double named Liang Yang, who is a wushu master who's doing the helicopter spin jumps in the air. I apologize to the fans: That was not me. But I did learn the fight, and when you see my face, it's me!

GRAVES The Viper was kind of like Frank Sinatra walking into *Game of Thrones*. He was like this slick guy, and he was known for being a very acrobatic, deft fighter. So immediately [we thought], "Oh, cool, we won't be doing classical jousting work, he can get airborne." And we really ran with that.

The crew shot the fight over several sweltering days at the Hotel Belvedere, an abandoned seaside resort in Dubrovnik, Croatia, that was damaged during the Croatian War of Independence.

INDIRA VARMA (Ellaria Sand) The heat was unbearable, but I was really lucky because I was barely dressed compared to everyone else in their corsets. [*Laughs*] I remember [Björnsson] was dressed in all that armor, and he had to be fed extra food because the pounds were just dropping off him in that heat and [with] the exhausting nature of the fight. They were all knackered. That was grueling for them, but I just sat there and enjoyed the sun, trying not to burn.

HAFÞÓR BJÖRNSSON (The Mountain) It was grueling work, going through the fight again and again and again in full armor in the sweltering heat in Croatia—but what a scene!

TOMMY DUNNE (Weapons master) That fight was so fierce. The sun was heating up the ground, and they were hitting each other. Each weapon, gosh, it was taking so much damage—because they're really hitting hard and hitting well and hitting the ground, and you'd have timber break. Or you'd have a little bit of damage on the side of the blade, [so] you'd take it out and put the next one in. You had to make sure everyone was looking well, so we resprayed them halfway through with some blood.

The tiny Viper slowly turns the battle to his advantage and ultimately triumphs—before the Mountain surprises him. The result is one of Thrones' *goriest, most heartbreaking deaths, as Clegane squashes Martell's head with his bare hands.*

PASCAL The squish! The squish that I will gladly take to my grave!

The effects team made a hyperrealistic cast of Pascal's head and ran a line of fake blood inside, so that when

(*From top*) Pascal's Oberyn makes a point to Björnsson's Mountain; Indira Varma and Peter Dinklage carefully watch her main squeeze

(PREVIOUS SPREAD AND THIS SPREAD) MACALL B. POLAY/HBO (3)

Björnsson pressed down with his thumbs, blood would leak from the eye sockets.

PASCAL The funniest thing about it is that you never see yourself three-dimensionally that way. In photographs or staring into the mirror, you do not get a real sense of what you look like until there's a very detail-oriented cast of you. I remember just sitting there and staring at it and being like, "Holy s---, I look so much like my dad." I learned that from staring at the cast of my head, right before watching it repeatedly get squished.

BJÖRNSSON It was a different experience [filming the squish]. As an actor, you have to be able to put yourself into the character, since your job is literally making the character and the situation he is in believable. But the VFX and the prosthetics, expertly done by the HBO team, made it really gruesome, even for me.

PASCAL It was a little like [the beheading of the android played by] Ian Holm in *Alien* with the tubing and the squirting and stuff, except that it was red blood rather than white juice. It's like, "Oh, that's my face. And there goes my face. Goodbye, face."

GRAVES To be honest, you don't really see the head get crushed on camera. Everyone always gets on me about that, and I'm like, "It's a sound effect! It's not on camera!" And they're like, "No, it is!" They don't care. They felt it happen. [But] I thought we showed some restraint there. I had no desire to see more than we were already seeing. [*Laughs*]

VARMA I literally had one take for my reaction shot to the fight. My coverage was, like, the last thing of the day, like, "We're losing the light!" So I had one take with nothing in the eye line, so I think my look of horror is me going, "What?! Only one go at this?!" [*Laughs*]

PASCAL The best part about it was post-death because it was so hot. They very apologetically made me lie down in a cool pool of blood with prosthetic chunks placed all over my face for this above shot, which was actually me lying there. It was all very cool to the touch, and it was relaxing. So there I am, dead, and I fell dead asleep.

GRAVES We did one shot where the Mountain rolls over exhausted, and we laid raw meat all over a stunt actor's face with the high-wide crane shot. So the blood puddle's spreading, and there's meat all over his face. It was pretty horrible.

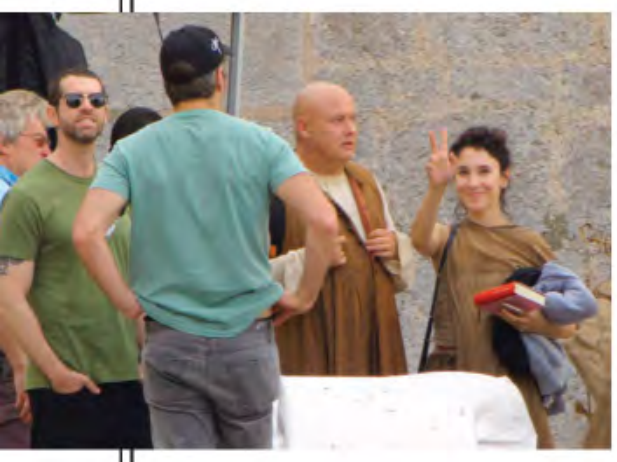
VARMA After [wrapping], Pedro and I just jumped in the sea, and very cheekily we met a guy who had a boat down there, and we hitchhiked back by boat instead of us taking transport back to the hotel. So that was the coolest way to end that fight scene. It was a very romantic escape.

The Real Story Behind a Fake Scene

The showrunners pranked spectators with a fictitious return. • **BY JAMES HIBBERD**

Remember that time Tyrion's murdered lover Shae returned from the dead and was wandering the streets of Meereen in season 6? No? Good, because that didn't happen. Yet some corners of the *GoT* fan base thought it did after actress Sibel Kekilli was spotted on the set in costume one year after her season 4 death, resulting in a flurry of online reports speculating about the strange return of Shae. The move was actually a 2015 prank by showrunners David Benioff and Dan Weiss on the paparazzi stalking their set in Spain. "Sibel was in the area and popped by to say hello, and we realized how much fun it would be to throw her in costume and have her stand around for all the people trying to grab photographs," Weiss says. "It was more of a social experiment to see what people would make of it, a Rorschach test, to see what stories people would weave to explain Shae being back alive in the story." Among the theories that emerged: Shae had a twin; she was a vision haunting a guilt-ridden Tyrion. But the most popular one was that the showrunners were totally messing with viewers. Hardcore *GoT* fans are tough to fool.

Sibel Kekilli visited the Meereen set to play a *game* with onlookers



A WHOLE

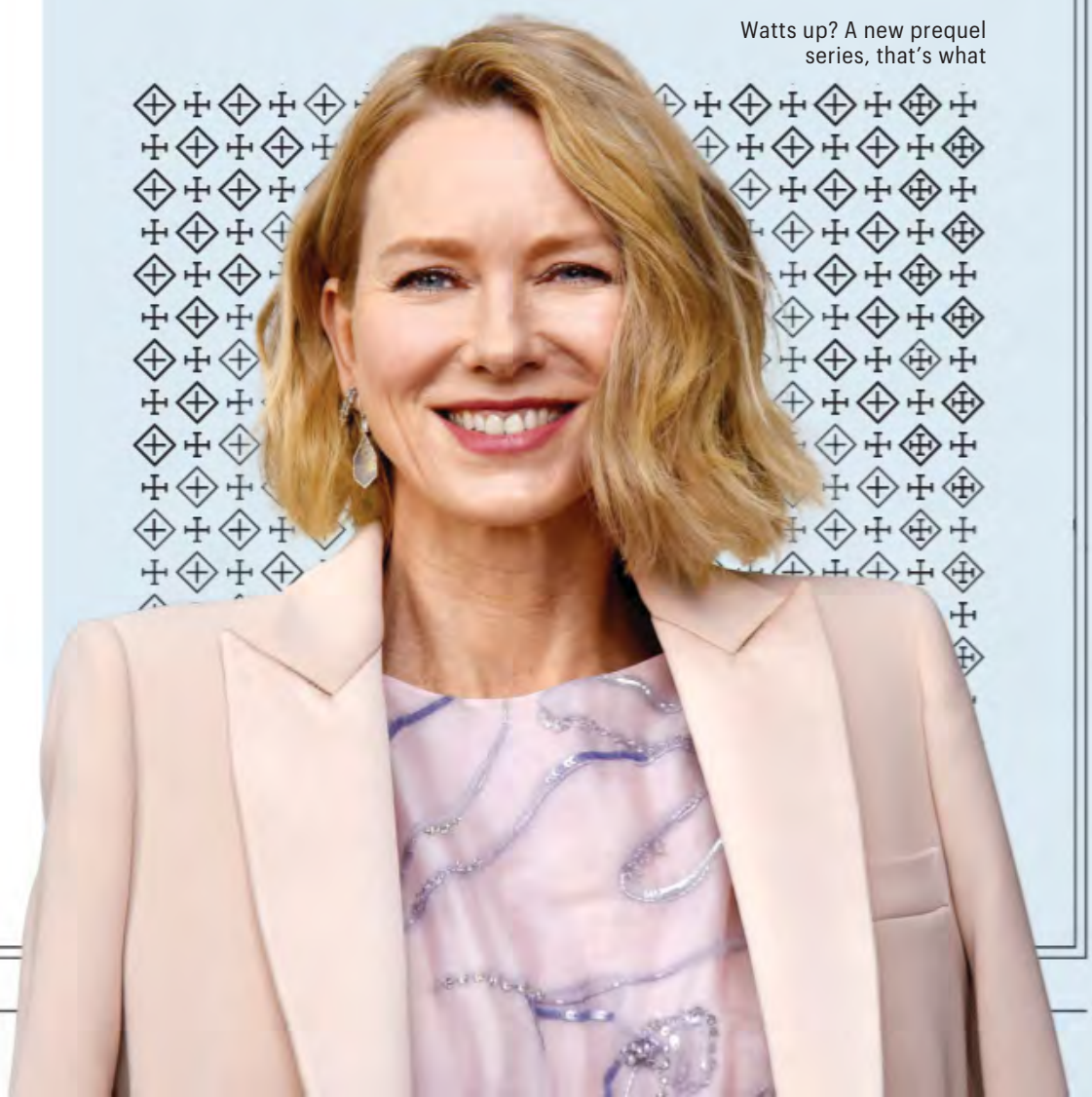
New Game

You don't have to say goodbye to Westeros yet; there's a prequel in the works.

— By James Hibberd —

GAME OF THRONES MAY NOT BE THE END OF GAME *of Thrones*. HBO commissioned five different scripts based on George R.R. Martin's fantasy world, then picked one (so far) to be made into a pilot that is headed into production this summer. Here's what we know: The as-yet-untitled series is set roughly 5,000 years before the events in *GoT*, and Westeros is a very different place. There are no Targaryens (or dragons), but early members of the Stark and Lannister families should be around. Iconic settings like King's Landing, Winterfell, and the Wall have not yet been built. The world is on the cusp of an event known as the Long Night, a devastating winter that lasted a whole generation ("[White Walkers] swept through cities and kingdoms, riding their dead horses, hunting with their packs of pale spiders big as hounds," as Old Nan memorably told Bran). The show has an all-new and diverse ensemble cast led by Naomi Watts (*King Kong*), who plays "a charismatic socialite hiding a dark secret." Writer Jane Goldman—who has plenty of R-rated genre storytelling experience (*Kick-Ass*, *Kingsman: The Secret Service*)—is the showrunner, and S.J. Clarkson (*Jessica Jones*) will direct. If the show is greenlit to series, the earliest possible airdate would be in 2020. Says Martin: "We're dealing with a different and older world, and hopefully that will be part of the fun of the series."

Watts up? A new prequel series, that's what



SET PHOTO: OSIRIS NAVARRO/TODO PEÑISCOLA; WATTS: ANDREAS SOLARO/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Since you Bean gone

WELCOME TO MY Ned Talk

Sean Bean reminisces about filming his final scenes, the original pilot, and his onscreen family.

— By Nick Romano —

About that secret Ned took to his grave, did anyone from the show give you a courtesy call to reveal the truth about Jon Snow's parents?
No. Like with everything with *Game of Thrones*, it was kept very dark and secret. I think that's the kind of magic and the glory of *Game of Thrones*—that's why it's so stunning and breathtaking when these secrets are revealed.... [The showrunners] said that some things happened, there were quite dramatic twists and turns. They let me know what they were within the first [season]. It was enough just keeping up with these intricate and complex story lines with all the families and different worlds. Any more information would've probably been overload.

Why do you think Ned resonates so strongly with people?
He's very honorable, he's very honest, he's a man of integrity, and he does the dirty work, as he does at the beginning when he chops off the guy's head. But he's a man who's very fair-minded, and he'll stick to his principles through thick and thin regardless of who he's up against. With him going to King's Landing and getting involved with such backstabbers, it's something he wasn't used to and certainly not at that level. I think it was quite tragic to see him chipped away by these people.... He was the first good man in *Game of Thrones*, and he stayed that way to the bitter end. His sons and daughters have taken those values for themselves, and it's a much richer show because of that—because of him.

There was the pilot that we all saw, and then there was the original unaired pilot. What do you remember from filming the original?
I think there were some very good moments. It was experimental in some ways. I think they were trying to portray what could be achieved—the kind of wonder and awe, the vast scale and complexity, all these warfaring tribes, the magic, the beauty, and the treachery. I think trying to get that into a pilot may have been difficult, and perhaps the story was lost a little. But nevertheless, it gave you a sense of what it could be. We were just going along with what was down there [on the page], but though they didn't use the pilot in its entirety, they used certain moments, and I think the pilot served its purpose.

What were some differences between the original pilot and the one that aired?
I remember a scene with Bran in the old tree and [his parents are] talking to him about life. He was very young at the time, when Isaac [Hempstead Wright] was playing the part. There are some nice scenes with [Maisie Williams as Arya]. I quite enjoyed those scenes because there was a lot of horrible backstabbing going on, and I think those scenes stood out because they were very natural and people could identity with them: a father and his children.

Coming full circle, what do you remember about filming your last scenes as Ned?
I suppose it was just the general downturn day, the slide into this pit of vipers that he couldn't really extricate himself from.... The death, that was wonderful because it was so unexpected. I thought it was amazing how they shot it. But I died, and then I had to do some scenes from earlier in the episode, so it wasn't the end for me. We were in Malta; it was very hot. It was very colorful. Everyone was there, and with things like that there's a sort of gallows humor to it. It's awful what's happening and you start giggling and laughing. When the head fell off, there were mistakes. It didn't quite work out sometimes. It was quite comic. So it breaks the ice a bit.

HELEN SLOAN/HBO

LET IT Burn

Back in 2015, on the set of Vaes Dothrak, the showrunners had already mapped the fates of the characters. But they were still grappling with their own fears. ◆ *By James Hibberd*

IT'S NOT YET TIME FOR THE GREAT fire, but the burning will begin soon.

It was October 2015. Sometime around 4 a.m. The production had set up camp in a military-controlled patch of Spanish desert. You'd recognize this setting as Vaes Dothrak, where Daenerys was held prisoner in season 6. It was the final night of filming at this location, and the last thing left to do was torch the Temple of the Dosh Khaleen (Emilia Clarke had already shot her triumphant emergence from the fire separately).

As the crew prepared the pyrotechnics and a bottle of bourbon was passed around, showrunners David Benioff and Dan Weiss answered a few questions about the end of *Game of Thrones*. It's an interview we waited a few years to publish—until the timing felt just right.

This was a unique point in the show's history. Benioff and Weiss were still a couple of seasons away from being finished, but were now beginning to seriously think about the end. They'd decided the fates of every major character. Sometimes they gave actors cryptic suggestions when filming certain scenes, with those final episodes in mind. The actor didn't know why they were doing something a certain way, only that it was somehow important. After *Thrones* is finished, fans will look back and see subtle hints that were dropped.

There were some fears, too. In addition to the usual writer worries (can we get it right?), a private concern at the time was that one of the show's major cast members would quit or fall victim to some random tragic circumstance. The cast was getting so popular, and there were so many who were absolutely essential. "If something had happened to them, or if they decided not to do it anymore, to make movies, we would be screwed," Benioff said later.

Beyond the worries, there was also relief and sadness. Very few fans realize the enormous amount of year-round work Benioff and Weiss put into *GoT*. They don't just pen the scripts while filming happens somewhere else. They're on set every day, for long hours, neck-deep in decision-making that impacts every aspect of what's seen on screen.

"It's the best job I've ever had, or ever likely will have," Benioff said. "But it certainly doesn't get easier."

How did they really feel about the show ending?

"If you're going to spend 10 years working on one show, you better really love the people you work with, because you're spending a s---load of time away from your family and friends," Benioff said. "You always put everything into it. So to spend time on a show that people respond to all over the world, it's incredibly gratifying. You have these characters you love and you can come up with ideas for them, and a few months later these incredible actors will be saying those things. That's such a rare gift."

Weiss was quiet for a bit before answering. "If 10 years ago somebody had given me a chance to write a ticket, I wouldn't have been crazy enough to write a ticket to something this great," he said. "I just think about how bizarre it will be to not be doing this anymore, because it becomes the water you swim in. It becomes every minute of every day, 365 days a year. After it's done, it will be like reentering some weird universe where I don't even know how people act there anymore.... When I'm 75 years old, I'm going to be [*affecting a quivering, elderly voice*], 'You know, it would be great if Tyrion said... Ah, goddamn it!'"

The duo get the alert from the crew: It's time.

We gather to watch the result of vengeful Daenerys torching the Temple. "Bring up the flames!" a crew member yells. Hidden gas lines are turned on. The hut's wood and grass catch fire quickly. Everybody is quiet.

The blaze is incredible. The intensity of the heat, the soaring height, the overwhelming diversity of billions of flames. Nowadays most productions use special effects for fire, even small ones. "We always use real fire when we can," Benioff noted as he watched. The dragons may not be real, but their flames are deadly.

You can see this shot in season 6, but cameras don't come anywhere close to capturing the experience of watching it being made—and that is often what it's like being on the set of *Game of Thrones*. There's a team striving to create thousands of perfect shots that sometimes last just seconds each, yet the effort that goes into the creation of those moments is hidden and enormous—the fiery passion of hundreds.

The Temple collapses into the sand. The fire dies down, and then it's gone.

GoT showrunners David Benioff and Dan Weiss

GAME OF THRONES: HBO; BENIOFF AND WEISS: ALBERTO E. RODRIGUEZ/GETTY IMAGES

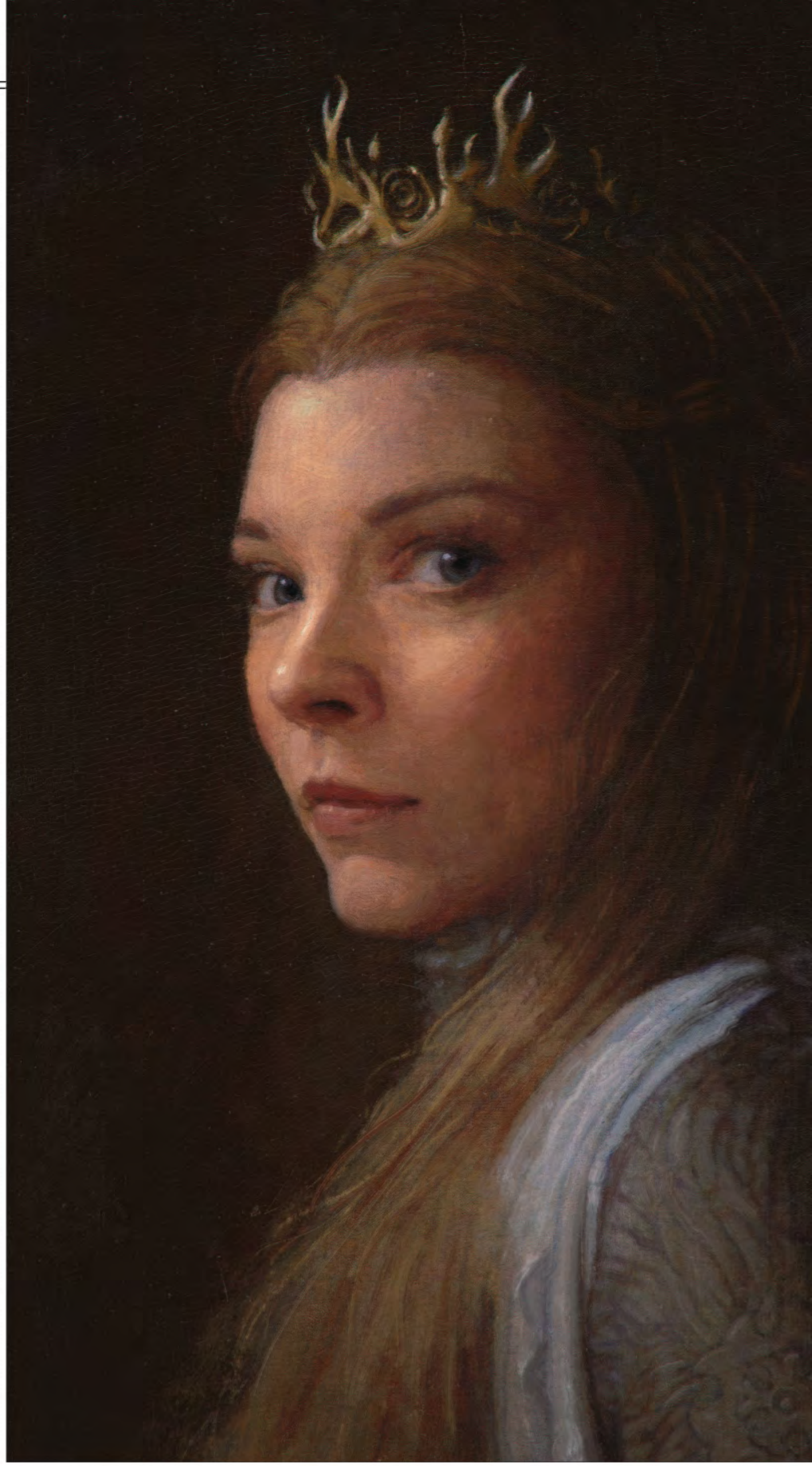
VALAR

Mortalis

Yes, all men must die, but did they all have to die so soon? EW catches up with some of the most notable losses from the series.

BY NICK ROMANO

Additional reporting by Devan Coggan



Illustrations by **SAM SPRATT**

Margaery Tyrell

Natalie Dormer

WHEN SHE DIED *Season 6, Episode 10*

HOW SHE DIED Cersei blew up the Sept of Baelor—and everyone in it—with wildfire.

ON GOING OUT WITH A BANG "It was such an epic exit. I was always suspicious that the Tyrells weren't gonna make it to the end.... There was that moment of knowing before the explosion when Margaery, she knew. She wasn't a casualty of her own incompetence. The reason Cersei won is not really because Margaery lost, it was because of the High Sparrow."

YGRITTE

Rose Leslie

WHEN SHE DIED *Season 4, Episode 9*

HOW SHE DIED Shot in the back during the battle at Castle Black.

WHAT YGRITTE WOULD THINK OF DAENERYS "There had to be a crescendo moment with Jon Snow and Ygritte. He had to go on as a lone soldier, and I think the relationship would've been too much of a hindrance.... I think she'd be in utter awe. How wonderful to meet anybody with dragons."

KHAL DROGO

Jason Momoa

WHEN HE DIED *Season 1, Episode 10*

HOW HE DIED Smothered by Daenerys after learning he would not recover from a vegetative state.

ON GETTING COMATOSE "I had to die, like, four different ways: He was in a coma, then it got worse, then the actual death. I was with my wife and was like, 'I've never died before.' I have to do all these different looks to see this sickness get worse and worse. I showed my wife, 'What do you think about this, honey?' I did the face and she goes, 'Don't do that face!' But I did the face and it was f---ing great!"

YGRITTE: HBO; DROGO: HELEN SLOAN/HBO

VISERYS TARGARYEN

Harry Lloyd

WHEN HE DIED *Season 1, Episode 6*

HOW HE DIED His sister's Dothraki husband gave him the crown he always wanted by pouring molten hot gold on his head.

ON DROGO'S GENEROUS POUR "I talked to some doctor friend about what would kill you. 'Would it be the gold penetrating the skull? Cutting off the brain? What would actually be the thing that kills you?' And I was thinking about how to play that. In the end, when it happens, I just screamed."

Ramsay Bolton

Iwan Rheon

WHEN HE DIED
Season 6, Episode 9

HOW HE DIED Eaten by his own starved dogs after the Battle of the Bastards.

ON FAN REACTIONS
"I think, secretly, people did like Ramsay or they loved to hate him. There's something about him which is different than Joffrey. Ramsay was kind of funny, and I think maybe that helps me in the real world. But I think people know that I'm an actor. If anybody comes up to me, they say, 'Oh, God, you're terrible,' 'I hate you,' or whatever, but I don't get shouted at."

OBERYN MARTELL

Pedro Pascal

WHEN HE DIED *Season 4, Episode 8*

HOW HE DIED An eye-popping blow from his archenemy, Gregor Clegane, in a trial by combat.

ON LOSING TO THE MOUNTAIN "It was a gut punch. I remember just telling [showrunners Dan Weiss and David Benioff], 'You guys are so perverse.... This is going to really f--- up my family when they see it.' I experienced the visceral sorrow of my character's end early, so that by the time we were shooting it, I was just cackling over seeing my face get squished."

ROS

Esmé Bianco

WHEN SHE DIED *Season 3, Episode 6*

HOW SHE DIED As revenge for Ros allying with Varys, Littlefinger handed her over to Joffrey for a "fresh experience."

ON PLAYING DEAD "They created these spikes coming out of the various places where the crossbows had entered me.... I found it remarkably graphic and emotional. There was one arrow that went into my stomach, and every time I looked down and saw this thing sticking out of me and the blood, I said, 'Oh, I'm gonna throw up.'"

TARGARYEN, MARTELL: HELEN SLOAN/HBO; ROS: HBO

SHAE

Sibel Kekilli

WHEN SHE DIED *Season 4, Episode 10*

HOW SHE DIED Tyrion strangled his lover after he found her in his father's bed, less than a day after she testified against him in court.

ON SHAE'S BETRAYAL "People are still asking me, 'Did Shae love [Tyrion] really?' I'm like, 'Of course!' This guy betrayed me, this guy is married to another woman, I was her handmaiden. What should I do? Him saying to Shae, 'You whore,' he said that to protect her, but at that moment it was too much for her. She couldn't think clearly."

OLENNA TYRELL

Diana Rigg

WHEN SHE DIED *Season 7, Episode 3*

HOW SHE DIED Drinking poison from Jaime Lannister after the invasion of Highgarden.

ON HER GRACEFUL, POINTED EXIT "It seemed to me to be absolutely right. I had been kept alive much longer than in the book, for example, and sooner or later it was obvious she was going to have to go.... It's in the nature of this series, isn't it? That people are dispensed with quite often."

SHIREEN BARATHEON

Kerry Ingram

WHEN SHE DIED *Season 5, Episode 9*

HOW SHE DIED Burned alive by her father's Red Priestess to bring good fortune to their army. It didn't work out.

ON FILMING WITH FIRE "I remember the fire getting a little close at one point for my liking. They did a close-up and were like, 'That was really good.' I was like, 'That [fear] was real!' It was fine. All the safety precautions were there, but from my angle it looked like it was getting a lot closer than I wanted."

HODOR

Kristian Nairn

WHEN HE DIED *Season 6, Episode 5*

HOW HE DIED In a time-rippling fight against invading White Walkers, Meera said, "Hold the door!" so Hodor held the door.

ON HOLDING THAT DOOR "At one stage I think there were nine people behind the door trying to stop me from getting through. I'm a pretty strong guy, and the entire set was moving and I was inching forward as I was slamming against the door. It was both physically and emotionally intense."

SHAE: NEIL DAVIDSON/HBO; TYRELL: HELEN SLOAN/HBO; SHIREEN, HODOR: HBO

Where's Walder?

The words for House Frey are "We Stand Together." That must be why everyone has gathered in Westeros. Can you find ol' Walder Frey in this sea of warring factions from the Seven Kingdoms? While you look, keep an eye out for 64 of his best friends (plus direwolves and dragons!). And don't worry: No one is hiding inside a meat pie.

ILLUSTRATION BY ULISES FARINAS

Illustration © HBO FIRST NAME LAST NAME

THE HITS AND MISSES OF WESTEROS

The Bullseye

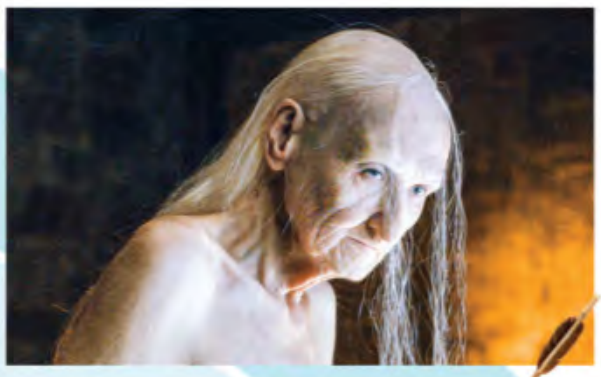
BY **MARC SNETIKER** @MarcSnetiker

Be careful which dragons you call ugly in middle school.

Please, please remember to inform castle staff if you are poison-free.

Most Likely to *Joey*

Every book in Citadel history and still no *Winds of Winter*



Friendly warning: Do not trust the "Melisandre" Instagram filter.

Bullseye sincerely apologizes for this arrow placement.

Olenna Tyrell: dropping mics before they were even invented

Don't worry: All losers in the Game of Thrones will receive a consolation ottoman.

Our knight in shining L'Oréal Platinum Blonde #7

Girls just wanna have FUNdamental authority over every man, woman, and child in this earthly realm.

Bad news: Winter is coming. Good news: So is her memoir!

At least one future Targaryen is in for a hell of a surprise from 23andMe.

In 2019, we drink *because* we know things.

If you really think about it, Arya's list is not *that* much shadier than Craig's.

He will be remembered for his pleasant demeanor and extremely unsecure email password.

A physique for sword fighting. A face for podcasting.

Oreo now has *GoT*-themed cookies, which definitely beats the last time something in **Westeros was double stuffed.**

All those in favor of banning throat-slittings, say, "Urgrhghgh-gurgh."

JOFFREY: MACALL B. POLAY/HBO; DROGON, MELISANDRE, IRON THRONE: HBO (4); ARROW: SHUTTERSTOCK/ANDREY BURMAKIN; ALL OTHERS: HELEN SLOAN/HBO (16)

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